

**FASHIONING CHANGE: THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CLOTHING IN
CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

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This dissertation is based on fifteen months of field research in Shanghai and Beijing conducted in 2002 and 2004. The central question with which this dissertation is concerned is how clothing and the clothing industry is constituted by and constitutive of the phenomenal changes that have taken place in contemporary China, especially in the post-1978 reform period. Specifically, this dissertation addresses two major questions: 1) Are the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry merely a part of China's economic development or modernization? And 2) does China's integration with the global economy translate into a Westernization of China?

The development of China's textile and apparel industries is a process of liberalization in which the socialist state cultivates and encourages market competition in China's economy. The development of China's textile and clothing industries is thus a part of the state's agenda to modernize China's economy. The economic modernization in China, however, is not intended to be an imitation of the West, but a means to an end. Similarly, the Chinese notion of modernity, which is reflected in the official narratives of the evolution of clothing styles, is not modeled after the West; instead, it is a story the Chinese tell themselves about themselves in relation to their own past. Therefore, modernization and modernity as reflected by the changes in Chinese clothing and clothing industry are vested with Chinese meanings.

Intertwined with the issues of modernization and modernity, this dissertation also examines the ways in which Western styles of clothing, design techniques, business models,

fashion shows and fashion weeks become localized in China. Thus, this dissertation challenges the Westernization thesis in the study of globalization. In addition, the dissertation also explores the integration of China's clothing industry with the global clothing industry through the examination of the exportation of Chinese made garments to the United States that is predicated on the global political economy.

All in all, this dissertation argues that clothing is not just a business, but one that involves cultural logics, and that it is not just economics, but also is endowed with meanings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XIII
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
1.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION.....	4
1.3 GLOBABLIZATION THEORIES	6
1.4 CLOTHING AND MATERIAL CULTURE MATTER.....	11
1.5 WHY THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CLOTHING?.....	16
1.6 FIELD RESEARCH.....	19
1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT	22
2.0 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE PRC.....	27
2.1 INTRODUCTION	27
2.2 TERMINOLOGY	29
2.3 INFANCY: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRY BEFORE 1949.....	31
2.4 DEVELOPMENT: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE PRE-1978 PRC.....	33

2.5	TAKE-OFF: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE POST-1978 REFORM ERA	36
2.6	THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE MARKET	52
2.7	CONCLUSION	55
3.0	EVOLUTION OF CLOTHING STYLES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: A TALE OF MODERNITY?.....	57
3.1	INTRODUCTION	57
3.2	MODERNITY AND TEMPORALITY	59
3.3	CLOTHING STYLES AND MORALITY OF TIME.....	62
3.4	EVOLUTION OF CLOTHING STYLES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA	64
3.4.1	Late Qing	64
3.4.2	The Republican Period.....	66
3.4.3	The Mao Era.....	68
3.4.4	The Reform Period	71
3.5	A TALE OF MODERNITY?.....	80
3.6	CONCLUSION	87
4.0	FOR THE SAKE OF ART OR FOR THE MARKET? THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF FASHION DESIGN	89
4.1	INTRODUCTION	89
4.2	FASHION AS A FIELD.....	91
4.3	DIVERSE VIEWS AMONG CHINESE FASHION DESIGNERS	95

4.4	THE EMERGENCE OF FASHION DESIGN AS A PRESTIGIOUS PROFESSION IN CHINA.....	97
4.5	MS. YE AND MR. YUAN.....	102
4.6	THEIR BUSINESS MODELS.....	107
4.7	THEIR BUSINESS MODELS IN CONTRAST TO <i>HAUTE COUTURE</i> AND FAST FASHION.....	112
4.8	WHAT IS A (CHINESE) FASHION DESIGNER?	115
4.9	WHAT IS A FASHION DESIGN?	117
4.10	CONCLUSION	121
5.0	CHINA FASHION WEEK: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE CHINESE FIELD OF FASHION.....	124
5.1	INTRODUCTION	124
5.2	FASHION SHOWS AND MODELING IN CHINA	126
5.3	THE HISTORY AND AGENDA OF THE CHINA FASHION WEEK	130
5.4	CHINA FASHION WEEK, FALL 2004.....	133
5.5	THE FINALE OF CFW 2004: MARK CHEUNG'S <i>JIANGNAN</i>	136
5.6	THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CHINA FASHION WEEK.....	140
5.7	CFW AS THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE CHINESE FIELD OF FASHION.....	148
5.8	CONCLUSION	151
6.0	GLOBALIZATION: A CLOTHING PERSPECTIVE	156
6.1	INTRODUCTION	156

6.2	TRANSNATIONAL FLOW OF GOODS, GLOBALIZATION THEORIES, AND NETWORK ANALYSIS	158
6.3	“AN IMPERFECT INDUSTRY”	162
6.4	IMPERFECT INTERNATIONAL TRADE REGIMES	164
6.5	THE U.S.-CHINA TEXTILE AND APPAREL TRADE DISPUTE IN 2005	167
6.5.1	Strong Opposition from Domestically-based U.S. Manufacturers and Workers	170
6.5.2	Support from U.S. Corporate Buyers and Consumers	171
6.5.3	The Chinese Side	174
6.6	GLOBAL NETWORKS OF CHINESE MADE CLOTHING: CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS	175
6.7	GLOBALIZATION: A CLOTHING PERSPECTIVE.....	179
6.8	CONCLUSION	183
7.0	CONCLUSION.....	186
7.1	“SOCIALIST MARKET ECONOMY WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS”	186
7.2	CLOTHING, MODERNIZATION, AND GLOBALIZATION.....	188
7.3	SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS	191
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	196

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1: Annual Apparel Output in China	36
Chart 2: Chinese Apparel Export.....	46
Chart 3: Share of Chinese Apparel Export in the World	47

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Backdrop of Mark Cheung's Show	153
Image 2: A Model Wearing a Mark Cheung Day Wear	154
Image 3: A Model Wearing an Evening Gown by Mark Cheung	155

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATC	Agreement on Textile and Clothing
CCP	China Communist Party
CFA	China Fashion Association
CFW	China Fashion Week
CNTIC	China National Textile Industry Council
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FFE	Foreign funded enterprise
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
MFA	Multi-fiber Arrangement
OBM	Original brand manufacturer
OEM	Original equipment manufacturer
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SOE	State owned enterprise
SWE	Statistic worthy enterprise
TVE	Township and village enterprise
WTO	World Trade Organization

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

I was riding a taxi to a department store on a sultry summer day in Beijing in 2002. The store sold traditional Chinese style clothing, which I wanted to explore as part of my preliminary research on Chinese clothing styles. Suddenly, the taxi-driver, a man in his 40s, started yelling, “Ji (hooker)! Ji! [That] must be a ji.” Guided by his angry finger, I saw a tall slender young Chinese woman wore a glaringly red silk halter-top, backless, with only two strings tied in the back, marching confidently down the street.

The style of clothing that she was wearing is called the “*dudou*” (literally meaning stomach cover) in Chinese, and it was traditionally only an undergarment. It is typically made of a piece of red cloth, and it is said by the older people to have the power to ward off evil spirits. As an undergarment, of course, it also has the function to protect the chest and the navel from cold. But wearing the *dudou* as outerwear outdoors was unheard of and even unthinkable either in imperial China (before 1912) or during the Maoist period (1949-76). As a matter of fact, only a little over two decades ago, the fashion scene in China was largely dominated by the nearly ubiquitous unisex Mao style *zhongshanzhuang* (also known as the Mao suit).

Following the taxi-driver’s finger, I couldn’t help but be “wowed” by the young woman wearing the *dudou*, although I did not have the same kind of reaction that the taxi-driver had

which suggested that this fashion style was a reflection of the wearer's moral degradation. As a native-born Chinese, I was taken aback to personally witness the bold appearance of a *dudou* on the streets of urban China. Before that encounter, I had only learned, somewhat doubtfully, from fashion magazines and news reports that wearing the *dudou* as an outer-garment had recently become the fashion.

Like most returning Chinese with extended stays overseas, each time I went back to China, I was surprised by the extent of the changes I saw in China's urban centers. But that time, I was astonished not by the new infrastructures being put up in "lightning" speed or by the equally fast disappearance of old neighborhoods, but by the new and dazzling fashions such as the *dudou* that had recently emerged. It was not that long ago that China was still in a scarce economy—I still remember when I was little my parents had new clothes made for me every year, but they had to first use the government issued coupons (*bupiao*) to buy the cloth with which my new clothes would then be made by a tailor. In fact, rationed cloth coupons were only abandoned since December 1983. Back then, ready-made clothing was not widely available, and clothing styles were rather limited and largely represented by the Mao style *zhongshanzhuang*. By contrast, China today is not only home to one of the largest clothing markets in the world, it also provides about a quarter to a third of the all the garments sold worldwide. Clothing styles become increasingly diverse in China, even vanguard styles such as the *dudou* are readily seen on the streets of urban China.

The central question with which this dissertation is concerned is what Chinese clothing and the clothing industry can tell us about the phenomenal changes that have taken place in contemporary China, especially in the post-1978 reform period. In discussing the enormous changes China has witnessed in the past a few decades, this dissertation engages two broad but

related issues—one has to do with economic development and modernization, and the other globalization.

The dramatic changes taking place in China in the post-Mao period are frequently attributed to a watershed event in modern Chinese history: the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that was held in December 1978. At that meeting, the CCP has decided to initiate economic reforms. The economic policies adopted by the Chinese government since 1978, disregarding the specifics, were summarized and popularized by the state and the media as two broad measures (as well as slogans): implementing economic reforms domestically (*duinei gaige*) and opening China up to the world (*duiwei kaifang*). These measures were designed to take China to a different course from the centrally-controlled planned economy (*jihua jingji*, also called command economy) of the radical socialist period (also called the Maoist period) that was secluded from Western economies (except limited and indirect connections through Hong Kong) and shift it to a market based one that participates in the global economy. The boom China has witnessed in the past three decades proves that those reform policies have been largely successful.

In the context of the Chinese government's focus on economic development and the boom China is experiencing, the questions this dissertation aims to address include: How are the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry related to China's economic development and modernization projects? Are the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry merely a part of the state initiated economic development or modernization? Moreover, related to the issue of modernization, is China trying to modernize itself in the image of the West? And what are the impacts of globalization on China, especially with regard to clothing and the clothing industry? While those questions will be answered specifically in other chapters of this

dissertation, in this chapter I will foreground some of the theoretical issues central to this dissertation, particularly in connection with modernization and globalization.

1.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION

Modernization, as a theory, was advocated by Western scholars, especially American scholars to deal with “the problems of economic development, political stability, and social and cultural change” in the Third World societies in the post-World War II era (Tipps 1973: 200). Although the term of modernization has been taken to be many different things, ranging from industrialization, economic development, rationalization, to secularization, various “theories of modernization are fundamentally theories of the transformation of national states” (ibid: 202). More importantly, these theories of modernization are largely influenced by evolutionary theory. For example, Rostow (1960) argues that Europe and the United States have gone through a series of stages of economic growth to get where they are today and that the underdeveloped countries have to learn from the West and follow its path to achieve economic development. The postulation of modernization theories of a unilinear evolution of human societies with the West at the apex has subjected modernization theories to a wide range of ideological, empirical, and methodological criticism.¹ The ideological critique of modernization theories is especially potent in pointing out that modernization theories are Western-centric and unwarranted in their implicit or explicit justification of European colonialism of the Third World countries.

¹ For a summary of the criticism of modernization theories, see Tipps, 1973.

However, modernization is not a negative but very positive and popular term in China. The popularity of the term is in large part due to China's goal to realize "four modernizations" (*sige xiandaihua*) in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology, which was first proposed by China's Communist leaders such as Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Mao Zedong in the 1950s and 1960s. While Western modernization theories have been widely repudiated by Western academics because of their entailment of a unilinear evolutionary scheme, it resonates with the Marxist theory of the evolution of human societies, which is also unilinear and to which the Chinese Communist Party still subscribes today, though it claims an eventual ending of all human societies in communism. Therefore, for the Chinese, it is not a problem, at least ideologically, that they have to learn from the West for the purpose of modernizing China. But modernization is not equated with Westernization in China; it would be hard to imagine that the Chinese Communist leaders like Mao would envision a Westernized China by learning Western science and technology, or more generally by promoting modernization. Modernization is regarded by the Chinese as a practical means to reach "modernity," which should be entirely Chinese, but not Western.

Chinese modernity, according to Lisa Rofel who borrows Clifford Geertz's phrase (1973: 448), is "a story people [the Chinese] tell themselves about themselves in relation to [Western] others" (1999: 130). In this relationship between China and the West, Rofel clearly sees a difference, in fact a perpetuating of the "East-West divide" (xii). Although Rofel does not pinpoint what exactly the differences are between China and the West, but the perpetuating of difference between China and the West seems to be the story of Chinese modernity. In a sense, she suggests that China would always have to play catch-up with the West, despite China's

efforts of modernization. Thus, the perpetuating of difference between China and the West does not seem to indicate a form of “other modernity” in China, but rather a lack thereof.

In this dissertation, I try to engage both modernization (in Chapter 2) and modernity (in Chapter 3) through clothing and the clothing industry in China. I argue that while the development of China’s textile and apparel industries may have been led by the state initiated economic reforms and is thus a part of the state’s efforts to modernize China, the changes in clothing styles in contemporary China have been narrated in such a way that it constructs a version of Chinese modernity that is contrasted to China’s past instead of the West.

1.3 GLOBALIZATION THEORIES

In general usage, globalization is used to describe “the increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people [across the borders of nation-states] brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel and by the worldwide spread of neoliberal capitalism” (Lewellen 2002). As a consequence of these seemingly unfettered and ever-increasing transnational flows, the world appears to be rapidly shrinking, or caught up in a mode of “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989). From a different angle, Anthony Giddens uses the notion of “time-space distanciation” to describe the effect that world is increasingly interconnected and that events taking place in one locale can now stretch out their effects to an increasingly greater distance (1990: 14). However, the image of a global village is frequently thought to be headquartered in the West, in the sense that global cultural flows are seen as emanating from the West, especially with respect to popular culture, including clothing styles, foods, and the like. Western scholars have described this particular dimension of globalization as Westernization or

global homogenization, as represented by the all too familiar Western, frequently American icons, such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola. Subsequently, scholars summarize this dimension of globalization as "McDonaldization" (Ritzer 2000) or "Coca-Colonization" of the world (see Hannerz 1992b: 217; Howes 1996: 1-16).

Anthropologists, however, generally do not agree with the global homogenization thesis, which in effect means Westernization or Western cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991, 1997). Through ethnographic research, they argue that Western goods or broadly Western culture are appropriated by people in non-Western societies in their local forms of consumption. Thus, they challenge the validity of the global homogenization thesis and emphasize the localization of global goods and/or culture. James Watson and his colleagues' research on the local forms of consumption of McDonald's in five East Asian societies provides an excellent example of the localization of a global product and its associated meanings (Watson 1997). The localization of the global, or more precisely the hybridization of the global and the local, is a strong anthropological argument because it is consistent with what anthropologists have done for a long time (and are arguably best at)—understanding how meanings are constructed in local settings. In fact, part of the argument I am trying to make in this dissertation with regard to Western styles of clothing and Western format of fashion shows is that they have to be understood in the context of China, thus my study of Chinese clothing and clothing industry supports the localization or hybridization thesis. That being said, focusing on one particular locale does limit anthropologists' scope of investigation of the global cultural flows.

The challenge that the global cultural flows poses on anthropology is that culture can no longer be treated a geographically bounded entity, but is indeed "deterritorialized" (Appadurai 1996; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Kearney 1995). Of course, anthropologists are also quick to point

out that just like McDonald's in East Asia the "deterritorialized" culture has to be "reterritorialized" in specific locations (Inda and Rosaldo 2002). However, this reconceptualization of culture does not address the issue of how anthropologists can study the global or transnational cultural flows methodologically. Taking the "deterritorialization" of culture a step further, Appadurai thinks that the global cultural economy is in "a complex, overlapping, [and] disjunctive order" (1996: 32). To describe such an order, he coins a series of new terms to explore the global cultural flows of people, images, technology, capital, and information, which he calls "ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes," underscoring the fluid and irregular nature of such "landscapes" (Appadurai 1996: 33). While the imaginary of landscapes raises interesting questions about the fluidity of culture, the concept does not offer any answer to how such "landscapes" are put in place in the first place and how the global cultural flows and landscapes are related to the "imagined worlds" people construct on different parts of these landscapes.

In more straightforward language, George Marcus lays out a method he calls "multi-sited research" that "is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal or physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (1995: 105). Thus, Marcus suggests that the way to study global or transnational cultural flows is to follow the people, the thing, or whatever the subject may be. For reasons unknown, the best ethnographies on transnational cultural flows seem to be the ones on the subject of the transnational movements of people (e.g. Constable 2003; Ong 1999; Rouse 2002). Perhaps, as Ong suggests, the transnational movement of people involves "both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (1999: 4), and hence

following the people who move from one site to another, such as the Asian “mail order brides” moving to the United States (Constable 2003), cannot only yield insights to the movement as well as the connection between the different sites, but also the nuanced changes in people’s identities that have resulted from the movement.

Less seen, however, are fine and detailed ethnographies on the transnational flow of goods that engage both the chains or paths through which the goods move and the changes of meanings associated with the goods following their movements. Sidney Mintz’s (1986) classic study of sugar that links the production of sugar in the Caribbean to its consumption in Europe, though as ethnographic as it is historical, clearly shows the possibilities of an ethnographic approach to “follow the thing.”

Although there are parallels between the transnational movements of things and people, the reasons why things move may or may not be the same as the reasons why people migrate. In Mintz’s (1986) case, there is a pattern for the global movement of sugar, which is that raw sugar had to be shipped to the West and processed sugar shipped back to the Caribbean. This pattern is explained by Wallerstein as a part of the world system, which is composed of three major areas: the core, the periphery and the semi-periphery (Wallerstein 1974: 135). The core refers to the West, the periphery includes those regions where people are subordinated within the world system, and the semi-periphery indicates those areas that fall in-between the core and the periphery. While the core specializes in banking, finance, and highly skilled industrial production, the periphery produces goods and raw materials to support industries in the core.

Although the global economy today may not constitute a “world system,” the general pattern of the global movements of goods still holds. For example, China is selling goods with low technology content such as clothes and shoes to the United States, and the United States is

selling goods with advanced technology such as Boeing airplanes to China. Therefore, there may seem to be a great deal of fluidity in terms of global movement of goods, or as some call it, the global “commodityscape” (Foster 2002), but beneath the surface of the free movements there is also some patterning of the particular kinds of goods that move from one area to another, and from one country to the next, which clearly has to do with the global political economy, at the core of which lies the inequality between the West and the rest. Moreover, while goods with Western origin, such as McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, are often assumed as signs of Westernization or Americanization of the rest, the importation of China-made garments to the United States, if anything, is not seen as “peripheralization” or “Sinification” of the core. Therefore, the anthropological study of the global flow of goods, in this case clothing, has to engage with not just how these goods are “reterritorialized” in local contexts, but also the global political economy that shapes the global flow of goods and the ways in which the patterns of the global flows of goods perpetuate.

In this dissertation, my study of Chinese clothing and clothing industry engages globalization on various levels and from various perspectives. On the one hand, I will examine how Western styles of clothing and fashion shows become “localized” in China. On the other hand, I will also examine the ways in which Chinese clothing industry and the U.S. clothing industry are connected via the exportation of Chinese made garments to the United States and the ways through which power unevenly impacts persons and groups involved in the industry in the two countries.

1.4 CLOTHING AND MATERIAL CULTURE MATTER

Why do things such as clothing matter? Daniel Miller (1998a) eloquently summarizes the two stages in answering the question in Western academia. The first stage was developed in the 1980s which “demonstrated that social worlds were as much constituted by materiality as the other way around.” The second stage, as represented by his edited volume, argues “that things matter can now be argued to have been made” (Miller 1998a: 3). Differently put, according to Miller, there are two different approaches to argue why things matter.

The first approach is represented by Appadurai’s “The Social Life of Things” (1986) and Igor Kopytoff’s “The Cultural Biography of Things” (1986). According to this approach, things matter because through the “social life” or “cultural biography” of things one can learn about the society and culture that the things encounter in their “life course.” Kopytoff explains,

[I]n situations of culture contact, [the biography of things] can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally defined and put to use (1986: 67).

Differently put, Kopytoff points out that things or objects may be thought about and used differently in different cultural settings. He proposes a method of a “culturally informed economic biography” in which an object would be examined as a “culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified into culturally constituted categories” (1986: 68).

Although not all anthropologists would take a “social life” or “cultural biography” approach to the study of clothing or material culture in general, most of them agree that material objects and culture are mutually constitutive in any given society. Many scholars believe that

clothing is both an indicator and producer of identity (e.g. Crane 2000; Davis 1992; Haye and Wilson 1999; Kuper 1973; McVeigh 2000), be it class identity (Nag 1991), ethnicity (Eicher 1999), gender (Barnes and Eicher 1997), or national identity (Tarlo 1996). For example, Emma Tarlo (1996) argues that because the *swadeshi* (or homespun) movement in India was initiated by Gandhi to resist British textiles and to fight for national independence from the Great Britain, homespun textiles came to symbolize national identity. As another example, in his study of Japanese high school students' uniforms, Brian McVeigh (2000) finds that the school uniforms serve as preparation and transition to suits and ties, a type of disciplining of workers and citizens demanded by the state. In this way, he argues that an ideology of discipline is woven into Japanese students' uniforms.

Daniel Miller (1998a) acknowledges the contribution of what he calls the first stage of material culture studies in highlighting the interconnection between material culture and social identity, but he also critiques those works for their mapping already important social identities, such as class and gender, onto material objects thus “privileg[ing] something called society” while overlooking the materiality of things (1998a: 10). Hence, he calls for a new direction in material culture studies (he calls “the second stage”) and proposes “that things matter can now be argued to have been made” (1998a: 3). What he means by that is two things. For one, material culture studies can return to the materiality of things, more specifically he refers to the “material context” of the objects under study, to explain why such things matter. For another, material culture studies ought to tell us more about those being studied than about those doing the studying. That is to say, how and why some things matter should be learned through ethnographic inquiry, but not imposed from outside by the researcher's preconceived notions (Miller 1998a: 13).

For example, in his study of Coca-Cola in Trinidad, coke matters not because it automatically symbolizes Americana, but because it is a “sweet drink,” which has to be examined along with other “sweet drinks” on the island, which includes some products that are considered “local” and others that are considered “foreign.” Miller argues that Trinidadian ideas about what is “local” or “foreign” with regard to drinks are not self-evident; instead, they are entangled with issues such as ethnic and racial politics, and developed out of negotiations between the competing goals and intentions of local company representatives and executives in overseas corporate headquarters (Miller 1998b).

Although I think Miller’s classification of the two stages in material culture studies is arbitrary and problematic—it is hard to pinpoint which works belong to the first stage and which works belong to the second stage based on his criteria because even he himself links material objects such as coke to social categories—his points that material culture studies ought to focus on the materiality of the specific objects under study and that the criteria of mattering should be based in the local society rather than from outside are well taken. In this dissertation, it is precisely because I recognize the importance of the specificity of the objects under study that I focus on the internal dynamics of China’s clothing and fashion industry and situate them within the specific context of contemporary Chinese society, and by so doing, I challenge the simplistic view of Westernization or the global homogenization thesis.

In the spirit of paying closer attention to the material objects themselves rather than the social categories, I have to explain what I mean by “clothing.” In fact, a number of terms are used to refer to clothing in various contexts in this dissertation: clothing, garment, apparel, fashion, clothing style, and dress. These terms are used differently by professionals in the clothing and fashion industry and academics in the humanities and social sciences. The

professionals in the industry generally use clothing and/or fashion as the most comprehensive term whose connotation includes “dress,” which is usually used to refer to a type of formal wear, especially the skirts for women. Whereas many scholars in social sciences and the humanities (perhaps except economists) use “dress” as the most comprehensive term, as in “dress studies” and “dress historians.”

Eicher and Roach-Higgins are particularly explicit with what they mean by “dress”:

[W]e have been intentionally supporting use of the word ‘dress’ as a comprehensive term to identify both direct body changes and items added to the body...we define dress as an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings.

Defined in this general way, the word dress is gender-neutral. This general usage does not rule out that, in specific contexts or with specific inflections, the word may be used to convey socially constructed, gendered meanings (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997: 15).

Thus, according to Eicher and Roach-Higgins’s definition, dress not only includes clothing, but also ornaments, and bodily modification, such as tattoos, scarification, and so on.

In this dissertation, however, I adopt the industry professionals’ usage of the term and use dress in a much narrower sense that only refers to a particular type of clothing. In general, I use the terms clothing, garment, and apparel interchangeably, but I recognize the differences between “clothing” and “fashion.” According to sociologist Yuniya Kawamura, “fashion as a concept means something more than [clothing] because it signifies additional and alluring values attached to clothing, which are enticing to consumers of ‘fashion’” (2005: 4). In addition to the extra value of “fashion,” the term also has the connotation of change, as Kawamura notes:

No matter which time period in history one is talking about, the definite essence of fashion is change. The fashion process explains the diversity and changes of styles...In some societies, where the dominant ideology is antipathetic to social change and progress, fashion cannot exist (2005: 5).

In this dissertation, I agree with Kawamura's usage of "fashion" and recognize the distinction between "fashion" and "clothing." I use "fashion" as a marked term and in the narrower sense noted by Kawamura, and "clothing" as an unmarked term which in a broad sense includes "fashion." In cases that I want to highlight the specific connotations of "fashion," I use the phrase "clothing and fashion." However, even in the most comprehensive sense, my use of "clothing and fashion" in this dissertation is relatively narrow and does not include ornaments and bodily modification, which by no means suggest that ornaments or bodily modification should not be part of the study of "clothing" or "dress."

The connotation of change in "fashion" noted by Kawamura also distinguishes "fashion" from "clothing styles." In any given time period in Chinese history, there are clothing styles, but if those styles do not change, I do not call them as "fashions" (instead, they may be called costumes). For the same reason, I recognize the Mao suit in the Maoist era, which was ubiquitous and very stable, as a style rather than a fashion, which is also part of the reason why I believe China's fashion industry did not emerge until the post-Mao reform period when clothing styles become more diverse and changeable.

1.5 WHY THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CLOTHING?

From a disciplinary standpoint, “culture” and “economy” are generally considered as belonging to two separate and autonomous fields.² According to Paul du Gay (1997), the contrast between “culture” and “economy” could not be sharper. He writes:

Certainly there is a powerful tradition of thought which holds that ‘culture’—and this normally means ‘high’ culture—is an autonomous realm of existence dedicated to the pursuit of particular values—‘art,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’—which are the very antithesis of those assumed to hold sway in the banal world of the economy—the pursuit of profit, unbounded ‘instrumentalism’ and so on (du Gay 1997: 1).

The contrast between “culture” and “economy” is also evident in the Chinese institutions of higher education. Take Donghua University in Shanghai (formerly known as China Textile University) for example, it has two separate schools that are relevant to my research (there are other schools and departments in the university, but many of them deal with the technical aspects of textile and clothing): the School of Garments (Fuzhuang Xueyuan) and the School of Management (Guanli Xueyuan). The former focuses on the “cultural” aspects of clothing, such as art history, fashion design, and modeling, and the latter contains majors that specialize in the business aspects of clothing, including management and marketing.

The two schools have separate faculty and separate library collections. From my interviews and interactions with the faculty from both schools, I could see a clear difference in their views and approaches to clothing. While in the School of Management, clothing is seen as

² Here, I adopt Bourdieu’s notion of a “field” (1996), which is fully explained in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

a product and sometimes an image which is part of the product, in the School of Garments, clothing is viewed as an artifact, a sign, or a representation, in consistence with the tradition of art history, design history, and ethno-history (e.g., Shen 1997; Huang & Chen 1995; Yuan 1994; Lin et al. 2000; Yang 1999; Zhou & Gao 1984).³ The reason why I was interested in both schools was that they contain knowledge and information critical to my research subjects—the practitioners in China’s clothing and fashion industry.

While university professors tend to maintain disciplinary boundaries, practitioners in the industry need to have knowledge of both the cultural and business aspects of clothing. Fashion designers are cases in point. During my field research, I accompanied many designers on their “market research” trips to various types of department stores or shopping malls, the stores of world leading name brands, and trade fairs, and I shadowed them in their negotiations with sales representatives from fabric companies, in their meetings with personnel of other departments in their own company, and in their efforts to train their sales teams and to showcase their seasonal collections to potential buyers. From these experiences, I learned that in order to score a market success with his or her designs a fashion designer not only needs to have the know-how of design and a good sense about the future trends of color schemes, fabrics, and styles, but also his or her target consumers, the production capacity of his or her company, the appropriate sales channels, and the right marketing strategies.

For a fashion designer, the perfect products are the ones that are not just made with the best designs and right fabrics, but also made in the right factories and sold in the right market place. Making perfect products like those clearly requires interdisciplinary knowledge and skills.

³ Similarly, Christopher Breward (1998) also sees divisions in the British academia, especially in the different approaches to clothing or dress in art history and cultural studies.

To understand the way in which fashion designers and other practitioners in the industry work, I had to take an interdisciplinary approach that takes into consideration both the “cultural” and “business” aspects of clothing and the clothing industry.

Moreover, the adoption of a cultural economic approach has also grown out of my theoretical concerns in anthropology. Culture, as a concept in anthropology, had since Malinowski been taken to refer to the life ways of a small-scale and relatively bounded society. Although the “interpretive turn” since the 1960s shifted the emphasis of anthropology from behavior and social structure to symbols, meanings, and mentality, anthropological fieldwork remains “locally” focused. In fact, one of the champions of interpretive anthropology, Clifford Geertz, called for “thick description” of the local contexts (“the web of signification”) in order to gain a deeper “local knowledge” (1973: 3-30; 1983).

However, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, interpretive anthropology faced rigorous challenge and questioning from postmodernism (Marcus & Fischer 1986). Among the questions postmodernists raised are: How can anthropology, a discipline that was established based on studies of small-scale and relatively bounded societies, retain its legitimacy in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world? And how can anthropologists reconcile the “local” cultural meanings learned through cultural interpretations with the external and frequently global political and economic forces that have shaped and even penetrated the life-worlds of practically any local communities in the world? As Marcus and Fischer point out, in responding to the postmodernist critique, a growing number of anthropologists are trying to bring together the two afore-plowed separate furrows of interpretive anthropology and historical political economy to inform their research (1986: 44).

For example, Jean Comaroff (1997) notes that the devastating impact of imports of Western clothing and other goods into South Africa in the nineteenth century only made the local mode of consumption, the emergence of “folk dress” even more powerful at expressing ethnic identities. Jane Schneider (1994) also provides a superb example, explaining that the change in popularity of polyester in the United States was not merely a matter of consumers’ preference or interpretations of the fabric but also linked deeply to global fiber manufacturers’ fierce competition. My use of the “cultural economy” is a deliberate attempt to fuse interpretive anthropology and historical political economy in this study of Chinese clothing and clothing industry.

1.6 FIELD RESEARCH

This dissertation is based on fifteen months of field research mainly in Shanghai and Beijing, but also in Zhejiang and Jiangsu areas near Shanghai, which I conducted from May to July in 2002 and from January to December in 2004. I chose Shanghai as the main field site because Shanghai is the largest and presumably the most fashionable city in China. It is also the birthplace of China’s textile industry, and it enjoys a high concentration of fashion companies, fashion media, and colleges and universities that offer programs in textile and clothing (such as Donghua University). I visited Beijing a few times because it is the host city of China Fashion Week, the most important fashion event in China. It is also the home of China Fashion Association, China National Textile Industry Council, and major national fashion media. I also took several field trips to visit factories in Zhejiang and Jiangsu areas that manufacture garments both for domestic and international markets.

During my field research, I employed a number of research techniques. First, utilizing contacts established in 2002, I conducted a month of participant observation at one private designer fashion company in Shanghai in 2004, during which I was given office space at the company as a researcher. I had the opportunity to observe the entire design process for a seasonal collection from sketching to finished sample garments. I shadowed the chief designer to shopping malls, trade fairs, meetings with sellers of fabrics, and various departments within the company to ensure the design and production of the “perfect” products. During the process, I also interviewed representatives from each department in the company. After the month of participant observation, I followed up with periodic visits to the company throughout the year.

Second, I attended over 100 fashion shows of various sorts and in different venues, including shows on college campuses, internal shows within fashion companies for their wholesale buyers, fashion shows in shopping malls and at trade fairs, and most importantly shows during Shanghai Fashion Week and China Fashion Week in Beijing. Those fashion shows not only allowed me to see fashion designs and trends, but also provided me the best opportunities to meet and interview fashion designers and other professionals in the industry, which leads to the third method—interviews.

By interviews, I mean semi-structured interviews that were pre-arranged and for which I prepared an interview guide. The host designers of the fashion shows typically had time for interviews with the media after the show. During Shanghai Fashion Week in 2004, I was granted a media pass by the organizer of the event and was able to meet and interview many designers like a fashion reporter. The Fashion Weeks were particularly helpful also because I was able to meet many more fashion designers who attended the events even though they were not hosting the shows. Besides at the fashion shows, I also interviewed fashion designers at their places of

work as well as outside work over tea or coffee. I was able to schedule interviews with fashion designers outside the venues of fashion shows through friends and acquaintances. These interviews snowballed into more introductions and opportunities for interviews. In addition to fashion designers, I also interviewed other professionals in the industry, including models, journalists, executives, trade agents, and university professors. In total, I interviewed about 120 professionals in this manner in China's fashion and clothing industry, but I met and talked informally with a much larger number of Chinese professionals in the industry. While participant observation allowed me to see firsthand how fashion was designed and produced, the semi-structured interviews with fashion designers and other professionals in the industry provided me with opportunities to gain deeper insights into their views and approaches toward their work and businesses.

Through personal friends, I got to know a few trade agents working in the export business in Shanghai. I shadowed several trade agents on field trips to visit factories in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces to inspect the facilities, monitor the production of the garments, and audit the factories in order to ensure the factories' compliance with local labor laws and the foreign importers' codes of conduct. During those visits, we were given tours of the entire assembly lines of the factories as well as the cafeterias and the dormitories of the workers, who were predominantly migrants from China's rural areas. I also accompanied Professor Gu Qingliang⁴ at Donghua University and his team to Ningbo city, Zhejiang province and visited a few factories for his research on the competitiveness of the garment industry of Ningbo city. Field trips like

⁴ I use Chinese names in this dissertation as they are called in China, i.e., surname first followed by first name. In cases they are called by their English names, I follow the English convention and put their first names before their surnames, such as Mark Cheung.

those provided me a good sense of how various groups of people and segments of the industry are connected.

In addition to the field research, I also did some archival research on the development of China's textile and clothing industries, changes in national organizations of the industries, and the evolution of clothing styles in contemporary China. I use the term "archive" in a broad sense, which includes internal documents I obtained from China National Textile Industry Council and China Fashion Association, the Textile Industry Almanacs, statistical yearbooks, academic works and other textual documents including fashion magazines and newspapers. The archival research allowed me to gain a good sense of how China's textile and apparel industries evolved to what they are today and to sort through the changes of clothing styles in contemporary China, which I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively as I outline them below.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

Chapter 2 examines the development of China's textile and apparel industries. In Chapter 2, I outline the major stages through which China's textile and apparel industries developed to its current scale. The goal of the chapter is two-fold: 1) to provide the general background to this dissertation, and 2) to address the question of how the phenomenal changes in China's textile and apparel industries took place. In answering these questions, I focus on the dynamic relationship between the Chinese state and market forces. I argue that both the state and the market have played significant roles in the development of the industries. While the overall Chinese economy has shifted from a state controlled planned economy to a market economy, the extraordinary development of China's textile and apparel industries would not have been

possible without the state's policies to reform the economy and its direct initiatives to diversify products, boost market demands, upgrade the industries, and eventually fuel economic growth.

Chapter 3 turns to the other side of the changes, namely the changes of clothing styles in contemporary China. From the late Qing to Republican China (1912-1949), to the radical socialist period (1949-76), and to the reform era (1978-present), clothing styles have undergone dramatic changes in contemporary China. In each of the four historical periods in contemporary China, there are different clothing styles or characteristics. The linear progression of the changes in Chinese clothing styles suggests that these changes are not the result of fashion cycles, nor merely the outcome of economic development; instead it indicates an association with the politics in each of the historical periods.

The correlation between changes in clothing styles and time paves the ground for the Chinese to construct a uniquely Chinese sense of progress and modernity through the official narratives of the sartorial evolution in contemporary China. According to this Chinese notion of modernity, China becomes modern not because of the adoption of Western styles of clothing (hence becoming more Westernized), but because clothing styles now are considered better than the ones in the past. It is in this sense that I argue that Chinese modernity is a story the Chinese tell themselves about themselves in relation to their own past rather than others (borrowing the phrase from Clifford Geertz and Lisa Rofel). I point out in this chapter that in making sense out of the dramatic changes in clothing styles, the Chinese have mapped their own meanings onto clothing.

Chapter 4 looks at the choices and strategies of Chinese fashion designers, specifically the choice of whether to design for the sake of art or for the market. In dealing with the divergent objectives of originality and marketability, fashion designers come up with three major

approaches, and subsequently three business models: *haute couture* (high fashion), *prêt-à-porter* (ready-to-wear clothing), and fast fashion. The hierarchy of *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter*, and fast fashion, as will be explained in detail in Chapter 4, hinges on the level of originality and exclusivity of the designs. In the global fashion industry, hierarchy of fashion is mapped onto the geography of the world. According to popular stereotypes, Paris is the capital of *haute couture*, Italy is known for its high quality *prêt-à-porter*, and China is assumed to be kingdom of fast fashion. By extension, Chinese fashion designers are assumed to be “copycats” of their Western colleagues.

By examining the cases of two prominent fashion designers, Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan, who favor art and the market respectively, I argue that not all Chinese fashion designers are copycats and that Chinese fashions are not a uniform fast fashion system. Despite the economic imperatives of their business, Chinese designers explicitly (as in the case of Ms. Ye) and implicitly (as in the case of Mr. Yuan) resort to art and originality. That is to say, they also include the logic of art in their business, which has to be understood in the context of China’s fashion industry. Because of that, I argue that the choices and strategies of Chinese fashion designers give insights to what it means to be a fashion designer in China.

In understanding the complexity of the choices of Chinese fashion designers, I also challenge the conventional conceptualization of fashion design as belonging to either the two autonomous and separate fields of art and economy (per Bourdieu 1993) or one single domain composed of art, artifact, and commodity (per Phillips and Steiner 1999). I argue that fashion design locates at the intersection of the two fields of art and economy and thus belongs to the two fields at the same time. Because of this particular nature of fashion design, I argue that a cultural economic approach is needed to study the logics of fashion design in China.

Chapter 5 extends the cultural economic approach to examine fashion shows in China, particularly fashion shows during China Fashion Week (CFW). As a means to promote trends, brands, and designers, fashion shows and fashion weeks are institutions imported from the West. As such, fashion shows during the CFW bear great similarities to those during London Fashion Week (LFW) as described by Entwistle and Rocamora (2006). Like the LFW, the CFW brings together key players in the Chinese field of fashion and the distinctions between these key players are manifested spatially and temporally during the CFW. Thus, I follow Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) and argue that the CFW is the objectification of the Chinese field of fashion.

However, based on my field research of the CFW in 2004, I also observed major differences between the CFW and the LFW studied by Entwistle and Rocamora. This chapter outlines and analyzes the ways in which the imported institution of fashion week is “localized” in China. Because of those uniquely Chinese characteristics of fashion shows during the CFW, I propose an ethnographic approach to study the cultural economy of the CFW and the wider Chinese field of fashion.

Chapter 6 focuses on the global connections of the Chinese clothing industry by examining issues associated with trade, specifically, the exportation of garments made in China to the United States. While other chapters have looked at the flow of clothing styles, fashion designs, fashion shows, fashion week from the West to China, this chapter looks at the reverse flow of Chinese made garments to the West. Just as Western clothing styles, fashion designs, fashion shows and fashion week have to be understood in the local context of China, I find that the meanings attached to the garments at the site of production in China are filtered out when the garments enter the United States. New and sometimes conflicting meanings are mapped onto them on the consumption end by various parties in the United States, as became evident during

the U.S.-China textile and apparel trade dispute in 2005. Therefore, I argue that my study of the transnational movement of Chinese made garments joins the anthropological critique of the global homogenization thesis in the study of globalization.

Furthermore, I argue that the different meanings of the Chinese made garments constructed by various persons and groups at different sites are in fact connected, because all are linked to a common network constituted by the movement of the garments. The common connection of the variously interested persons and groups to the global network of the Chinese made garments are important in two ways. First, it creates a network effect, in the sense that it perpetuates the differences among the differently interested or positioned persons and groups in the network, because they act by reacting to other different interests or positions. Second, the network provides a channel through which power unevenly impacts the variously positioned persons and groups that are connected to the network. Because power is unevenly distributed in the network, it is not surprising that the Chinese made garments do not have same kind of valor of Western origin products such as Coca-Cola or McDonald's. Chapter 6 thus aims to move beyond the broad anthropological critique of the global homogenization thesis and providing a clothing perspective on globalization that emphasizes both meanings and power that are vested in the Chinese made clothing.

2.0 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE PRC

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the textile and apparel industries are often regarded as “sunset industries” in developed countries such as the United States, they have vital importance in the Chinese economy. They provide fabric and clothing to meet the basic needs of a population of 1.3 billion people, employ about 19 million workers,⁵ and earn much needed hard currencies to finance the nation’s modernization projects. In the year of 2003, for example, China exported US\$80.5 billion worth of textiles and apparel products and generated a trade surplus of US\$64.9 billion, which accounted for over 18 percent of China’s total export, and was 2.54 times of China’s total trade surplus (China Textile Industry Development Report 2003/04, hereinafter CTIDR). That is to say, without the trade surplus in textile and apparel products, China would have had a trade deficit in 2003. In fact, this pattern in China’s import and export has persisted since 1999.⁶

⁵ The number is reportedly over one hundred million if those employed in supporting industries, such as the cotton growers, are counted. These numbers are estimates by the China National Textile and Apparel Council. The actual numbers could be higher or lower than in these reports, since there is no census statistics on the textile and apparel industry.

⁶ China’s textile and apparel trade surplus exceeded the national total for the first time in 1999, which was 106 percent of the latter (ACTI 2000). Trade surplus has long been seen positively in China; it is only recently that China’s huge trade surplus has become publicly recognized as a major cause of trade disputes and pressure to its currency revaluation.

The importance of the textile and apparel industries is matched with their scales. China has the world's largest scale of textile and apparel industries. Not only is China home to one of the largest clothing markets in the world, it also exports more textile and apparel products than any single country both in terms of volume and value. In 2003, China's textile and apparel exports accounted for 15.9 percent and 23 percent of the world's total exports respectively (WTO 2004). In a recent report, the U.S. International Trade commission has the following assessment of China's textile and apparel industries: "China is expected to become the 'supplier of choice' for most U.S. importers [the large apparel companies and retailers] because of its ability to make almost any type of textile and apparel product at any quality level at a competitive price" (USITC 2004: xi). With the liberalization of international trade in textiles and clothing, particularly the phase-out of the quota system and the phase-in of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) within the framework of the WTO in January 2005, China's textile and apparel industries are poised to expand even more and to capture greater shares in the world market.⁷ However, such enormous scales of China's textile and apparel industries have primarily been built in a relatively short period of time. In fact, before 1984 cloth was still rationed in China and the Chinese had to use government issued coupons (*bupiao*) to buy cloth or clothes. Perhaps due to their recent nature, scholarly works on the history of China's textile and apparel industries are very scanty, with the notable exception to Prof. Gu Qingliang and his team's report, which mainly outlines statistically the changes of the industries (1999). Regrettably, the report is dated and contains many statistics but little analysis. In this chapter, I will present an updated account of the development of China's textile and apparel industries, with the goal of providing the general background to this dissertation. In the course of

⁷ A trade dispute broke out between China and the United States in 2005 because a surge of Chinese textile and apparel imports occurred after the elimination of the quotas, see Chapter 6 for details.

presenting the developments of the textile and apparel industries, I highlight the role of the state and the market in bringing about the phenomenal changes of these industries. The central question this chapter addresses is how China's textile and apparel industries have become what they are today.

My primary sources of data for this chapter include the Almanacs of China Textile Industry (ACTI 1982-1999) and China Textile Industry Development Report (CTIDR 1999-2004),⁸ which are both official yearbooks of the industries, and World Trade Organization (WTO) statistics. This chapter also benefited from my interviews with national level officials of the textile ministry and industry council and associations. Before I move to the historical developments of the industries, some explanation is needed with regard to my use of the term of "textile and apparel industries" in this dissertation.

2.2 TERMINOLOGY

While this dissertation is mainly concerned about Chinese clothing and the clothing industry, this chapter deals with both the textile and apparel industries in China. This is because the two industries are closely connected, as the textile industry provides input for the apparel industry. More importantly, it is because the parameters of "the textile industry" are somewhat unique in China. The English term "industry" is loosely used by the government, professionals in the trade, and academics alike on several different levels, such as the "men's wear industry," the "garment/apparel/clothing industry," the "textile industry," and the "fashion industry." In

⁸ CTIDR is an annual publication issued by the China National Textile and Apparel Industry Council, which has replaced the official Almanac of Chinese Textile Industry since 2000.

Chinese, however, the “industry” of a particular category of clothing, such as the men’s wear industry, is called a “*hangye*,” and the “industry” as in the “garment industry” or the “textile industry” is called “*gongye*” or “*chanye*.” To complicate the matter even more, the “textile industry” (*fangzhi gongye*) in China is broader in the sense that it officially includes the “clothing/garment/apparel industry” (*fuzhuang gongye*). For example, the current national umbrella organization of the textile and apparel industries is named the China National Textile Industry Council (CNTIC), or *zhongguo fangzhi gongye xiehui*,⁹ which evolved from the former Chinese Ministry of the Textile Industry and includes the national garment industry association and associations of specific product categories as member organizations. Therefore, it is difficult to discuss China’s apparel industry without talking about its textile industry, even though internationally the two are generally treated as distinct but related industries. However, the scope of this chapter does not cover all textiles, which consists of three sectors based on the end use of the products: garment textiles, home textiles (home furnishing), and industrial textiles. Instead, I primarily focus on apparel and its upstream industry of garment textiles, which is also the largest among the three sectors, accounting for over 52 percent of all textiles in China in 2003 (Xu 2004: 174).

Within these narrower parameters of the Chinese textile and apparel industries discussed in this dissertation, I have to further concede that not all Chinese garment manufacturing enterprises are included in the official statistics of the Chinese apparel industry that are cited in this chapter. For historical and bureaucratic reasons, Chinese garment manufacturers are fragmented and fall under the administration of three relevant governmental or semi-

⁹ Since 2004, the Council’s English name changed into China National Textile and Apparel Council, but there was no change in its Chinese name.

governmental industry organizations: the China National Textile Industry Council (formerly the Ministry of Chinese Textile Industry), the China National Light Industry Council (formerly the Ministry of Chinese Light Industries), and Ministry of Commerce (formerly Ministry of Domestic Commerce). Consequently, statistics of the Textile Ministry and later the Textile Industry Council, though they include the majority of Chinese garment firms, typically do not include garment manufacturers under the administration of the other two ministries. Moreover, frequently only firms with annual revenue of over 5 million *yuan* (*guimo yishang qiye*, or enterprises above scale) are included in the national statistics, and hence those enterprises are called Statistically Worthy Enterprises (SWEs). Thus, the statistics cited in this chapter are in fact official estimates rather than actual numbers. Yet they are the best available estimates, and because they are fairly consistent in their scope of measurement I also find them useful to illustrate historical trends in China.

In the following sections, I will outline the major developments in China's textile and apparel industries. I divide the course of their development into three stages: infancy, development, and take-off, which roughly correspond to three major historical periods in contemporary China: the late Qing and Republican era (pre-1949), the radical socialist period in the PRC (1949-1978), and the reform era in the PRC (post-1978).

2.3 INFANCY: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRY BEFORE 1949

Modern Chinese textile industry emerged when nationalist entrepreneurs and foreign capitalists set up textile mills in Shanghai and other coastal cities at the end of the 19th century. However, the late Qing (1644-1911) and Republican era (1912-1949) were ridden with wars (including

civil wars and wars with European imperial powers and Japan), and consequently the Chinese textile industry did not have a stable political and social environment in which it could quickly develop during those periods. When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, there were only 179,000 textile firms with a workforce of 745,000, and 5 million cotton spindles and a small number of wool, bast fiber,¹⁰ and silk spindles (China State Textile Industrial Bureau 2000), and Shanghai represented about half of the national production capacity (ACTI 1983: 7). The product mix was limited to natural fibers, primarily cotton yarn and fabric, and the industry relied heavily on imports of Western equipments and raw materials. For example, in Shanghai, all the textile equipment and 80 percent of the cotton were imported before 1949 (*ibid*).

Compared to the textile sector, the industrialization of the apparel sector emerged even later in China. Before 1949, clothing was mostly hand-made either by housewives at home, or by tailors (*caifeng*) who visited their neighborhood or village from time to time and peddled their wares, or by tailors in tailor shops in the cities. Most tailor shops were composed of a master tailor with a few apprentices who made clothes primarily to the orders of customers and occasionally sold some ready-made clothing on the side (similar operations still exist in urban China today but have diminished to a minimum presence).¹¹ Garment factories appeared in the Republican era; however, they were small in scale and manufactured only basic items, such as shirts and undergarments. According to some sources, there were 18 shirt factories in Shanghai before the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945), hiring about 200 workers, with a monthly output of just over 9,000 shirts (Huang 1994: 249).

¹⁰ Bast fiber refers to any of several strong, ligneous fibers, as flax, hemp, ramie, or jute, obtained from phloem tissue and used in the manufacture of woven goods and cordage.

¹¹ Vera Fennel's (2001) dissertation studies the struggle faced by some small tailor shops in Beijing.

2.4 DEVELOPMENT: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE PRE-1978 PRC

When the Communists came to power and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949, they started a nationalization campaign, which was accomplished in three steps. First, they took over the *Guomindang* (or KMT) and foreign owned textile mills and turned them into state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Then, they transformed privately-owned mills into state-run enterprises and the private owners into shareholders, which was dubbed as “*gong si he ying*” (literally meaning public-private co-operation). This was accomplished through the government's propaganda and by the enterprise owners on a purportedly volunteer basis. As a matter of fact, the private textile mills had few options but to cooperate with the government not just because of the political pressure, but also because the state took complete control of the distribution of raw materials and final products, which meant that textile mills could only buy cotton from and sell finished yarn and fabric to the government. As a result, they had to cooperate with the state. As a part of the state controlled distribution system, the state instituted cloth rationing in the form of “cloth coupons” (*bupiao*) on a per capita basis in 1954. This measure was deemed necessary in a shortage economy at the time, and was kept in place for the following three decades. By January 1956, all private textile firms had adopted the mode of “*gong si he ying*” in Shanghai (ACTI 1983: 8). Nationwide, the second step of nationalization was completed by the end of 1956. The third step was to organize independent workers into co-ops (*hezuoshe*) and then to turn the co-ops into state-owned enterprises. This final step was completed in Shanghai in 1958 (*ibid*), and at roughly the same timeline nationally. By the end of 1958, the entire textile and apparel industries (and the overall economy) became state-owned and state-run and was integrated into a socialist system of planned economy.

In the planned economic system, the state was the ultimate owner and manager of the economy. Take a textile mill for example. It would receive directives from the government as to what and how much to produce in each year, which was derived from the central government's "five year plans" (*wunian jihua*), and then it would buy the required amount of raw materials from another state-owned organization at a state regulated price, and finally it would sell its products to designated state-owned organizations at a regulated price. The workers and managers or cadres of the mill were all employed by the state, and were all paid equally by the type of work they performed ("*tong gong tong chou*," or equal work with equal pay), with only slight variations in pay due to such factors as the rank or title (*zhicheng*) and the number of years of work experience (*gongling*). The textile mill was only responsible for production, and the state ultimately pocketed the profits or underwrote the losses, which had little impact on the pay of the employees of the mill.

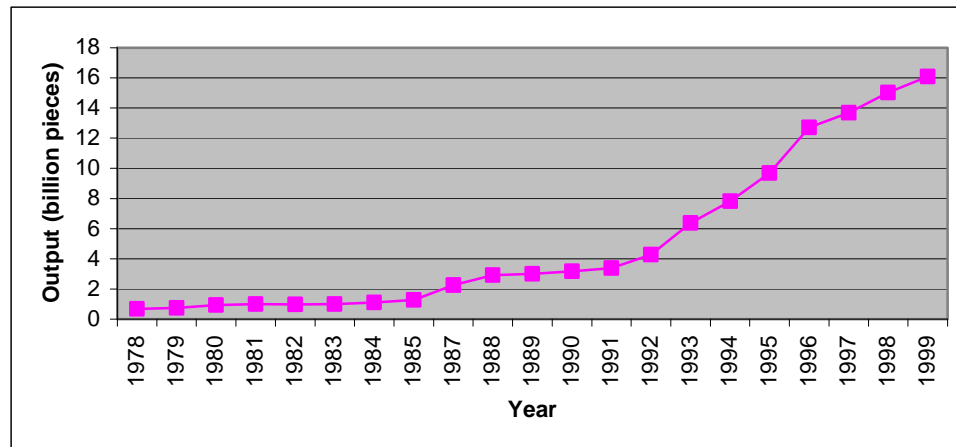
The planned economy, or command economy, although it defied market rules, had the advantage of rapidly achieving economy of scale and of concentrating scarce resources on the pressing needs, which were essential to the war-torn PRC. Despite the disruptions of the natural disasters between 1958 and 1961 and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the growth of the textile industry in China was still impressive. In 1970, China's annual yield of cotton yarn and fabric reached 11.31 million bales and 9.15 billion meters respectively, a five-time increase from the amounts in 1949. In the same year, Premier Zhou Enlai announced that China's cotton yarn and fabric output had taken the 1st place in the world during a reception of the American journalist Edgar Snow (ACTI 1990: 2). In addition to natural fibers, China started vigorously to develop chemical fibers since the early 1970s. By mid-1980s, China's production capacity of chemical

fibers already exceeded 1 million tons, and became one of the world's largest producers (ACTI 1987: 1).

Compared to the textile sector, the development of the garment sector was not nearly as impressive. Clothing continued to be made at home or by tailors, and ready-to-wear clothing (*chengyi*) was still a rarity in the late 1970s. In 1978, a total of 673 million pieces of *chengyi* were made (China State Textile Industrial Bureau 2000), which came down to less than one piece per person, not to mention a portion of those was exported. In Shanghai in 1984, for example, about 81 million pieces of cotton-made garments were exported, which was equivalent to only 17.9 percent of the total amount of cotton fabric exported in the year. For the domestic market in the same year, only about 23.5 percent of the cotton fabric was made into ready-to-wear clothing, about 80 million pieces (ACTI 1985: 252). That is to say, both the export and domestic sectors relied heavily on fibers and fabrics rather than finished garments in Shanghai in 1984. Overall, the Chinese garment industry only started to take off in late 1980s and the early 1990s, as seen Chart 1 below,¹² which was reasonable because its development was bottlenecked by, among other things, the development in the upstream textile sector. The fact that textile products (including clothing) were only purchasable with rationed cloth coupons between 1954 and 1983 indicates a scarce or shortage economy during that period. Under those circumstances, production—rather than consumption—of fabrics rather than finished garments was prioritized. The centrally controlled planned economic system in socialist China achieved those priorities effectively and rapidly.

¹² The data are from Almanacs of Chinese Textile Industry (2000), p. 135.

Chart 1: Annual Apparel Output in China



2.5 TAKE-OFF: CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN THE POST-1978 REFORM ERA

The planned economic system began to change when the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee was held in December 1978. This watershed meeting orchestrated economic reforms and “open-door” policies (*duinei gaige, duiwai kaifang*), which ushered China into a new era. The reform policies adopted at the meeting dramatically transformed the Chinese economy. Even though the specifics of China’s economic policies have varied since then, they are largely a continuation and deepening process in the same direction as the initial policies set forth at the meeting in 1978. With respect to the Chinese textile and apparel industries and the Chinese economy in general, the meeting marked a gradual structural shift away from a state-controlled planned economy towards a market-based economy, and from a largely closed economy to one with increased participation in the global economy, culminating in China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. In the post-1978 period, the Chinese textile and apparel

industries have seen continued processes of state deregulation, market-oriented reforms, and industrial upgrading.

Although the planned economic system worked reasonably well in the post-war environment of a shortage economy, it had some intrinsic problems. First of all, it separated distribution from production, and pay from productivity. Hence, there was a lack of incentives and accountability for both the workers and management, which eventually led to low productivity and inefficiency especially after the waning of revolutionary enthusiasm following the radical socialist period. Second, the absolute monopoly of state-owned enterprises excluded competition, which resulted in further inefficiency. Last but not the least, the state's emphasis on production and its adoption of a rationing system consequently depressed consumption demands. These problems became more severe when the shortage problem was solved and the socialist ideology of "devoted spirit" (*fengxian jingshen*) was losing its grip on people especially following Mao's death in 1976. Top government officials in the textile and apparel industries began to recognize those problems in the early 1980s.

At the 1982 annual National Textile Industry planning meeting, Hao Jianxiu, the model worker turned Minister said, "In the new situation, a new predicament has emerged: the [problem] of scarce commodities in the past has been solved, whereas previously popular products became surplus inventory" (ACTI 1983: 178). She thought that there should be a shift in focus from "quantity" to "quality," and she called for enterprises to study the changes in consumer demands rather than to merely produce according to the orders from the commerce departments (ACTI 1983: 177-182). After a few years of fast growth in the early 1980s, the problem of overcapacity coupled with weak consumption became more acute. In December 1983, the state decided to abandon the rationing system of cloth coupon once and for all. This

measure temporarily mitigated the problem of overcapacity by releasing the depressed demand. More importantly, it marked the end of the production-driven era, and the entry of the Chinese textile and apparel industries into a market-driven period, during which product diversification becomes more important.

In the early 1980s, all economic and political factors pointed to reforms to rectify the problems in the old planned economic system. In one speech in 1983, Wu Wenying, the new Minister of the textile industry, emphasized the terms of “shifting tracks” (*zhuangui*) and “changing models” (*bianxing*). She reiterated the principle of “three shifts” (*sange zhuan yi*) her predecessor Hao Jianxiu brought about, “to shift the focus from speed, production, and capacity to product diversification and quality, technological innovation, and profitability; and to change from a pure production model to a production and commerce model” (ACTI 1985: 175). This speech might still sound like a typical Chinese political speech, more about principles and slogans (typically dotted with numbers) than practices. But in actuality pilot reform programs were being tested in some state-owned enterprises.

In 1984, four successful measures were concluded from those pilot programs: 1) reforming the management system at the firm level and adopting of a “general manager responsibility system” (*changzhang fuzezhi*); 2) transforming of the firm management from an administrative unit to a business unit, and allowing the management to make independent decisions as to diversifying their products according to market demand and forming alliances with other regions, firms, and commerce departments; 3) breaking down the “lifetime employment system” or the “iron bowl system” (*tiefanwan*) of cadres and workers, and partly adopting contract-based employment system; and 4) reforming the old egalitarian salary system by tying bonus and compensation to work performance (ACTI 1985: 188-190).

These four measures brought about two significant changes in the SOEs under reform. For one, those reformed firms were granted more authority by the state and were able to function as relatively independent businesses rather than as de facto administrative units (*danwei*) that were an extension of the huge state apparatus. For the first time, the reformed SOEs were allowed to decide what to produce and to cross the rigid boundary between industry and commerce known as “*gong bu jing shang*,” which meant that industrial units ought not to conduct commercial activities, as they derived their mandates from two separate power organizations (two different ministries). Consequently, the reformed firms were able to sell their products directly rather than through the commerce department. For the other, incentives were introduced into the system as the salary and bonuses became more flexible and were tied to job performances. As a result, the overall performance of those SOEs also improved, as the report concluded, “Practice (*shijian*) proves that the reform measures bring about profits, and they are beneficial to the country, to the enterprises, and to the workers” (*ibid*: 189).

Indeed, the pilot reform programs were so successful that the central government decided to implement structural reforms at the enterprise level across the country. It issued a strong order that unless authorized by the central government, all enterprises had to adopt the reform measures by June 1987, and that unreformed enterprises by the deadline would be dismantled (ACTI 1988: 178). The tough initiatives from the central government ensured that China’s SOEs shifted from administrative units to relatively independent business units, a first step to diverge from the tracks of a planned economy. However, the fact that the firm-level reform measures were carried out under the direct order of the state still pointed to the nature of a “command economy” in the 1980s, a point that will be further discussed later in this chapter.

In addition to implementing structural reforms in the SOEs, the state also started to introduce competition to the economy by allowing the establishment of enterprises with other types of ownership, primarily township and village enterprises (TVEs) and foreign-funded enterprises (FFE). Since 1978, township and village enterprises took off quickly, absorbing the first wave of excessive agricultural labor freed by the “household production responsibility system” (*jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi*) in the agricultural sector. Township and village textile enterprises produced a revenue of 43.8 billion *yuan* in 1987, a six-time increase from that of 1983 and about 30 times of the 1978 level. The growth in the apparel sector was even more remarkable. In 1987, township and village garment factories produced 1.94 billion pieces of garment, accounting for more than half of the national total output (ACTI 1990: 33). In 1990, 79.1 percent of all ready-to-wear garments were manufactured by the TVEs (ACTI 1991). The TVEs’ market share in China’s garment industry peaked in 1993, totaling 5.8 billion pieces, which constituted over 90 percent of the national output of all ready-to-wear garments in the year (ACTI 1994: 11-2). These numbers indicate that the Chinese garment industry has been predominantly led by the market, i.e., the non-state-owned sector, since the 1990s.

The boom of the TVEs in the garment industry also gradually expanded to the more capital intensive textile industry. In 1995, there were a total of 61,783 TVEs in the textile and apparel industries, hiring 5.7 million people, creating aggregate revenue of 518.6 billion *yuan* (ACTI 1996: 221-222). The miraculous growth of the TVEs was partly because they started up as relatively independent business entities rather than administrative units like the SOEs that were directly and inefficiently managed by the state. The TVEs’ relationship with the local township governments was much less rigid than the SOEs with the central government. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, most of the TVEs were contracted out, or privatized by means of

“management buy-out,” or turned into joint ventures by absorbing foreign capital, or merged with other domestic firms, or formed through a combination of the above-mentioned arrangements.

Some TVEs went public in the stock market in the late 1990s. For example, The Youngor Group (Yage’r Jituan), the largest garment manufacturer in China, with a revenue of 10.12 billion *yuan* in 2003, was a small township enterprise established in 1979 by a few returned “educated youth” (*zhiqing*) from the countryside, who then turned it into a private business (Ren 1998), which later went public in the Shanghai Stock Exchange in 1998. Like the Youngor Group, many TVEs as well as SOEs became public owned corporations in the late 1990s, which made ownership types of the firms more complex statistically. In fact, the TVEs were no longer listed in the statistics of the national textile industry almanacs since 1997, which suggests that by then most of the TVEs have transformed their identities just like the Youngor Group. Nevertheless, the TVEs were one of the most dynamic players in China’s textile and apparel industries, who contributed significantly to the growth and competitiveness of the industries.

Meanwhile, another type of firm also entered the competition: the foreign funded enterprises (FFE), including joint ventures and wholly foreign owned firms. The growth of foreign direct investments (FDI) in China’s textile and apparel industries was equally impressive as the TVEs, but with a relatively later surge. In the end of 1982, there were only two joint ventures in China’s textile and apparel industries, the number increased to 150 in 1986, with 46 of them in apparel (ACTI 1988: 26). By 1990, there were a total of 2,192 FFEs in China’s textile and apparel sectors, with a cumulative investment of about US\$ 2 billion. FDI in China picked up even greater speed in the 1990s. In 1991 alone, 972 new FFEs invested in China’s textile and

apparel industries, representing an annual increase of 44 percent (ACTI 1992: 14). By 1999, a cumulative total of 5,156 foreign funded textile and apparel firms had established in China, accounting for 28.7 percent of the national output of the entire industries in the same year, second only to the state owned enterprises, which accounted for 29.7 percent (ACTI 2000: 2).¹³ However, while the state-owned sector had a loss of 3.73 billion *yuan* in 1999, the FFEs made a total profit of 55.53 billion *yuan* (*ibid*). Clearly, the state sector lost out to the non-state-owned sectors in the market competition even after the initial reforms in the 1980s.

The fact that the SOEs lagged behind the TVEs and the FFEs in profitability and efficiency after the initial reforms in the 1980s suggested that the SOEs were still not as well equipped as the TVEs and FFEs for a market economy. This was mainly because after initial reforms the SOEs were still operating under a primarily planned economic system, entitled “planned economy as the basis and market adjustments as the supplement” (*jihua jingji weizhu, shichang tiaojie weifu*). In a national textile industry planning meeting in 1982, Minister Hao Jianxiu talked about the ways to execute the State Council’s reform plans within the primarily planned economic system. She quoted Chen Yun, the then Vice Premier, ““Our country has to stick to the principle of the planned economy as the basis and market adjustment as the supplement,’ ...we have to realize that the planned economy is an essential characteristic of the socialist economy...the primary and supplementary positions [of planning and the market] should not be subverted, nor should [the two] be equally treated” (ACTI 1983: 181). The establishment of an intrinsic and ideological link between socialism and the planned economy is derived from an orthodox Marxist belief that the economic base determines the superstructure. As the Chinese Communist Party has long subscribed to Marxism, for many of the party

¹³ There are more SOEs in the textile sector than in the garment sector, and they are typically very large in scale because the textile sector is much more capital intensive than the garment sector.

members reforming the base of the planned economy, i.e., the SOEs and collective enterprises, would entail endangering the superstructure of socialism, which proved to be a tough obstacle for further reforms of the SOEs through the 1980s and early 1990s.

It was not until Deng Xiaoping, the retired “core leader” of the Communist Party and the architect of the 1978 reform, made his famous commentaries on the market reforms during his visits to Shanghai and the special economic zones (SEZs) in southern China in 1992, that the market mechanism (the *shichang*) graduated into an “essential characteristic” of socialism. He stated that planning and the market were not markers of socialism or capitalism, and that there was planning in capitalist economy just as there was market in socialist economy. He clearly felt that the speed of reform was not fast enough (due to conservatism over concerns of the socialist ideology) and remarked that “the courage [to reform] should be greater, and the steps [of reform] should be faster.” Deng’s statements essentially settled the ideological debate over where the market reform should be headed. His remarks on the association between the market and socialism, officially dubbed “Deng Xiaoping’s South Tour Remarks” (*nanxun jianghua*), were widely studied by the Communist Party and broadly circulated in the state-controlled media, and later incorporated into the report of the 14th Party Congress in the same year. The Party Congress monumentally declared that the goal for further economic reform was to fully construct the socialist market economy, which heralded the miraculous growth of Shanghai in the 1990s, much like the phenomenal growth of the Special Economic Zones in the 1980s.

To laud Deng’s contribution to the monumental economic reforms and the astounding growth of the Special Economic Zones in South China,¹⁴ a popular song by the name of “Stories

¹⁴ The SEZs include Shenzhen, Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, which are adjacent to Hong Kong and Macau, and Shantou and Xiamen in Fujian Province, which are close to Taiwan. Hainan Province was added to the list of SEZs later.

of the Spring” begins like this: “Year 1979 was a spring, there was an old man who stood by the South Sea of our motherland and drew a *circle*...Year 1992 was another spring, there was an old man who stood by the South Sea of our motherland and wrote down *poems*...” (emphases mine). Even though the lyrics of the song were supposed to be taken figuratively, they did have direct references in real life: the “circle” referred to the establishment of Shenzhen as the first SEZ, and the “poems” alluded to Deng’s remarks on market mechanisms as a part of socialism. As the song words suggest, a giant (Deng) made history in 1979 and 1992. Directly benefiting from the change of policy in 1992 was the development of Shanghai, particularly the Pudong district. The miracle of Pudong, changing from barren rural lands into the “Manhattan of China” in less than a decade, was indeed the direct result of China’s effort to “construct the socialist market economy.” The growth of Pudong, Shanghai was just as sudden and mysterious as Shenzhen, so much so that a Chinese professor and friend of mine jokingly expressed to me that the second part of the song should be changed like this: “...Year 1992 was another spring, there was an old man who stood by the *East* Sea of our motherland and drew *another circle*” (emphases added to indicate the changes he made). Incidentally, Pudong is a major financial district in Shanghai and in China, home to the Shanghai Stock Exchange and hundreds of domestic and foreign banks, which in itself embodies the spirit of a market economy. Yet paradoxically, the “market” did not emerge according to the law of supply and demand; instead it was brought about by the powerful state, and in some ways single-handedly by a historical giant as the song suggests.

China’s agenda in the 1990s to thoroughly build a market economy, albeit a socialist one, could be called “the second wave of economic reforms,” which differed from the first wave of reforms following the 1978 meeting in allowing the market to play a fundamental rather than a supplemental role in allocating resources. Although the “second wave” may be not as historic as

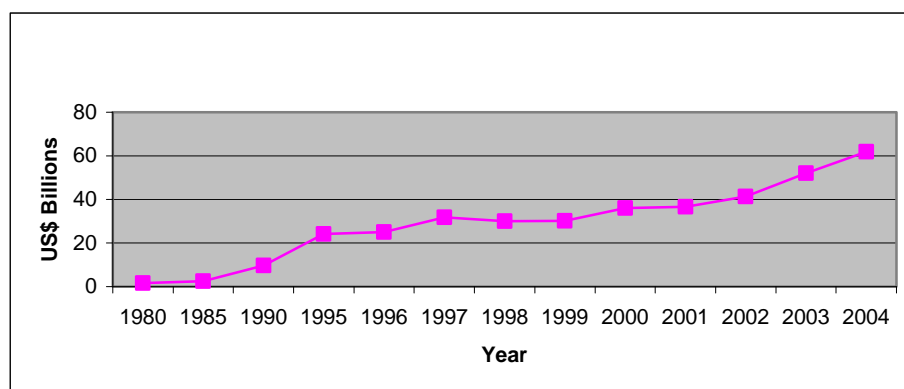
the initial reforms in the 1980s, it was very important and necessary to the continued growth of China's textile and apparel industries and the overall economy. This was particularly true when top government officials conservatively tied economy to the socialist ideology, which became an obstacle to further market reform. Internationally, the "second wave" was a much needed assurance that China would not go back and close its door again especially after the state suppressed the democratic movements in 1989.¹⁵ FDI reacted favorably to China's "second wave," as evidenced by the boom of the FFEs in the 1990s described previously. The boom of FFEs and the continued expansion of the TVEs further increased the market forces in the Chinese economy. Following the shift to a market-based economy, the Chinese government disbanded the Ministry of the Textile Industry, which was the administrative organ that served the planned economy, and formed a "voluntary organization"—though with strong governmental ties—of the General Textile Council (*fangzhi zhonghui*) in 1993. The organizational change suggested that the government was clearly loosening its control on the textile and apparel industries.

However, a market-based economy is not free from problems. The participation of the TVEs and the FFEs, and the increased productivity of the SOEs resulting from the market reforms led to dramatic rises in production capacity in the textile and apparel industries. In the cotton textile industry, for example, there were a total of 18.9 million spindles in 1981. Ten years later, the capacity had more than doubled to 41.9 million spindles (ACTI 1999: 174). Consequently, creating demand became an urgent issue. As the increase in domestic demand was much slower than the increase of the production capacity, the state and the industries turned

¹⁵ The democratic movements in late 1980s were led by college students, who protested in large scale on the Tian'anmen Square against government corruption. On June 4th, 1989, the Chinese government used the army and forcefully suppressed the student movements. For details of this incident, see Brook, 1992.

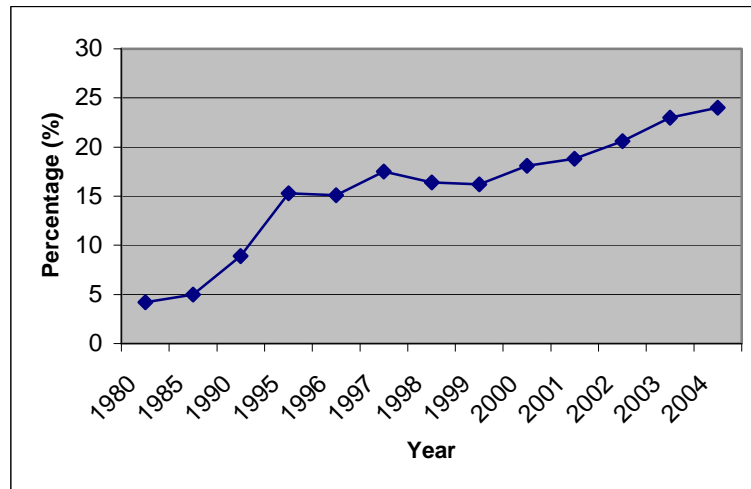
their eager eyes to overseas markets. In 1986, at two major economic meetings, the central government decided that the strategic goal of the textile and apparel industries in the 20th century was to expand exports. They thus designed a host of favorable policies for the exportation textile and apparel products, including tax deduction and tax rebates (ACTI 1988: 2). To further facilitate the export business, the garment and silk industries were transferred from under the administration of the Ministry of Light Industries (*Qing gong bu*) to the Ministry of Textile Industry (*Fangzhi gongye bu*) in 1987. The textile and apparel industries have since become export oriented industries and major hard currency earners for China. As Charts 2 and 3 illustrate below, Chinese apparel exports have seen dramatic growth since 1980, and China has become the world leader since the mid-1990s, capturing about a quarter of the world's total clothing export market in 2004.¹⁶

Chart 2: Chinese Apparel Export



¹⁶ The data are from the WTO statistics database, available at http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/statis_e.htm, accessed numerous times, last time accessed on March 25, 2008.

Chart 3: Share of Chinese Apparel Export in the World



Even though exports created more demand for Chinese textiles and clothing, which temporarily eased the problem of overcapacity, it did not eliminate the problem, especially when there was uneven efficiency and productivity in China’s textile and apparel firms. In a market based environment, there is a tendency for the winners to take all. This was generally true in China in the 1980s and 1990s, during which the growth in export of textiles and clothing correlated to the growth of the TVEs and the FFEs. The SOEs, on the other hand, were losing market shares to the FFEs and TVEs. When the number of the SOEs that suffered from losses grew rapidly, the excess production capacity was concentrated in the SOEs. In 1990, 37.9 percent of all state-owned textile firms and collective enterprises, which were regarded by the government as “within the socialist system” (*xitongnei*),¹⁷ were running at a loss (ACTI 1991:

¹⁷ Collective enterprises (*jiti qiye*) in theory should include rural township collectives. However, the Chinese government regarded the TVEs (*xiangzhen qiye*) as outside the system (*xitongwei*) (e.g., ACTI 94: 3, & 5). The TVEs are different from the SOEs and urban collectives in that they do not receive funds from the state budgets and their workers typically do not enjoy pensions after retirement, which are typical of the socialist system. Nevertheless, the SOEs are the predominant component of the socialist sector or *xitongnei* firms.

7). In 1991, the loss widened to 41.9 percent of “the socialist sector” (ACTI 1992: 8). In 1993, the number of SOEs and collectives at a loss further widened to 44.9 percent, and for the first time the entire state-own sector ran a negative aggregate after-tax profit of 616 million *yuan* (ACTI 1994: 1).¹⁸ This trend continued in 1995, and peaked in 1996, when over 54 percent of all SOEs in textiles suffered losses and the entire SOE sector ran a negative aggregate after-tax profit of 10.58 billion *yuan*, (ACTI 1999: 346-7). This pattern of system-wide losses continued through 1999. The underwhelming performance of the socialist sector or the *xitongnei* firms, primarily the SOEs, was partly because of the overcapacity built up over the years and partly because the SOEs were less well equipped for the market competitions than the TVEs and the FFEs, particularly in their rigid employment and pension system. Worse yet, an SOE could not discontinue a money-losing operation or declare bankruptcy by itself, which lay ultimately in the hands of its owner, the state.

After five consecutive years of system-wide losses, the central government decided to do something about the SOEs in the textile industry in 1997. The time to address the problem also had something to do with China’s prospect of joining the WTO, which entailed more severe market competition as well as greater opportunities for Chinese textile and apparel firms. China’s membership in the WTO became a reality in 2001. To increase the competitiveness of the SOEs was essential for them to meet the challenges and opportunities of China’s accession to the WTO. The then Premier Zhu Rongji and his deputy Wu Bangguo outlined an aggressive plan to dismantle ten million outdated cotton spindles, to lay off 1.2 million textile workers, and to return the textile SOEs to profitability by 2000, one year before China’s scheduled admission to the WTO (ACTI 1999: 173-8).

¹⁸ Another place stated the aggregate loss as 780 million *yuan* (ACTI 1995: 78).

In 1998, the Chinese state launched a three-year campaign of “depressing spindles” (*yading*), which began in the cotton textile sector. The problem of loss plagued SOEs in the cotton textile sector as well as those in other sectors and industries. But because the cotton textile sector suffered the worst loss and was one of the largest employers, it was chosen as the first group to shed production capacity, which would then serve as a model for other sectors to follow. Hence, the campaign to dismantle excess spindles in the cotton textile sector was dubbed “Project Breaking Point” (*tupokou gongzuo*). As the ultimate owner of the SOEs, the central government took the initiative in the campaign. To better execute its policies, the central government restated the “voluntarily-based” China Textile General Council as a governmental organization and renamed it as China State Textile Industrial Bureau in March 1998, one specific responsibility of whose was to oversee “Project Breaking Point.” In addition, the central government set aside several hundreds of million *yuan* in special funds to compensate those SOEs that had dismantled spindles and laid off workers or gone bankrupt altogether. It also worked closely with local governments and required them to share the cost of compensation and subsidy, and tied the project to local officials’ work performance. By the end of 1999, a total of 9.06 million outdated cotton spindles had been dismantled and 1.16 million textile workers had been laid off (ACTI 2000: 47).¹⁹ In 2000, an additional 300,000 some cotton spindles were dismantled. Following the cotton textile sector, about 280,000 wool spindles and 1 million silk spindles were dismantled in 2000. Three hundred SOEs were forced to go bankrupt, more than 400 SOEs were acquired by or merged with other firms, and 45 billion *yuan* of bad loans of the SOEs were written off (CTIDR 2000/01: 14).

¹⁹ Generally, these laid-off workers from the SOEs would receive some unemployment benefits from the government, which were typically not sufficient to sustain a living thus those laid-off workers would have to temporarily rely on their savings and/or support from family members. Most of those workers ended up in a different job either through the government or their own personal networks.

The final results of “Project Breaking Point” exceeded the original plan, and the SOEs in the textile sector as a whole returned to profitability in 2000, though still not as competitive as the non-state-owned sectors. Premier Zhou Rongji remarked on the final report of the “Project Breaking Point” by the Textile Bureau, “In order to face the opportunities and challenges of the accession to the WTO, the textile industry’s tasks to readjust and upgrade are still very heavy...”(ACTI 2000: 47). Nevertheless, the overall technological level in the SOEs have improved tremendously as a consequence of over 10 million outdated spindles being destroyed during the campaign, and the SOEs have become leaner and meaner by laying off about 1.5 million workers and severing huge sums of bad loans—shedding the baggage carried over from the socialist planned economy (the unemployment and reemployment of those workers was a related but different kind of painful adjustments). Following the completion of the campaign, the SOEs have become much more independent and better positioned than ever before to compete with non-state-owned textile firms and international competitors, poised to cash in on market opportunities to be offered by China’s pending accession to the WTO.

As the three-year *yading* campaign was completed, the China State Textile Industrial Bureau was disbanded by the central government in 2001. Replacing its role, the China National Textile Industry Council was formed on a purportedly voluntary basis, which has since been chaired by Mr. Du Yuzhou, the former Minister of the Textile Industry and former Director of the disbanded China State Textile Industrial Bureau. The industry yearbook or almanacs published under the former government Ministry or Bureau were also replaced by the China Textile Industry Development Report (CTIDR), which was published by the newly founded CNTIC. Unlike the almanacs, the new CTIDR contains no state directives or speeches by

government officials—the emblem of the “command economy” was apparently gone along with the governmental agency.

In summary, modern Chinese textile and apparel industries have undergone three stages: infancy, development, and take-off. In the course of these developments, two major political events in the history of the PRC have caused structural shifts in China’s textile and apparel industries and the overall economy. One was the founding of the PRC and ascension of the Chinese Communist Party to power in 1949, which resulted in the nationalization of the Chinese economy, the textile and apparel industries included, into a centrally controlled planned economic system. The other was the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held in 1978, which charted a path of economic reforms toward a market-based economy. During the post-1978 reform era, there were three phases of structural adjustments for the textile and apparel industries. In the first phase, the initial reform measures transformed the SOEs from largely administrative units to relatively autonomous business units in the early 1980s, which also led to the boom of the TVEs. In the second phase, a new wave of market reforms were implemented in the early 1990s, which further opened up the Chinese economy, facilitated a boom of the FFEs in the textile and apparel industries, and encouraged further growth of the TVEs. The FFEs and the TVEs constituted the non-state-owned sectors, which have since dominated China’s textile and apparel industries. In the third phase, market forces further consolidated their dominance in China’s textile and apparel industries in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. In the meantime, the SOEs were forced to downsize, sever more ties to the abating planned economic system, and further shape themselves in the image of non-state-owned enterprises. As an overall trend of these developments, it appeared that the state was retreating while the market forces were

ascending. This begs the question: who is the agent of change in the development of China's textile and apparel industries, the state or the market?

2.6 THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE MARKET

To understand the phenomenal changes in China's textile and apparel industries, we have to understand the role of the state and the market in this process. The overall shift from a "command economy" to a market economy suggests that the market is playing more pivotal role than the state in the development of China's textile and apparel industries, which seems to be supported by the current state of the textile and apparel industries. In 2000, state capital only accounted for 18.7 percent of the aggregate capital of all statistical worthy enterprises in the textile and apparel industries, and the collective capital 9.94 percent of the total capital of the SWEs (Du 2004: v). Taking into account those non-state-owned firms with revenue below 5 million *yuan*, who hired half of the workforce in the entire industries, the percentage of state capital would account for only less than 10 percent (*ibid*).

The subtext to the broad structural shift in China's textile and apparel industries is that the market and state control are fundamentally contradictory forces, so much so that one has to give way to the other for the economy to work. In many ways this is true in China, and there are plenty of examples in the development of China's textile and apparel industries. In the course of nationalizing the economy after the founding the PRC, the state took over all the distribution channels of the economy and effectively "forced" the non-state owned sectors to cooperate and quickly turned the entire economy into a state controlled planned economy. In the post-1978

reform era, facing the challenges from both the domestic and international markets (in anticipation of China's access to the WTO), the state was forced to initiate "Project Breaking Point" that aimed at reducing production capacity and ended up closing down, selling, or merging many state owned enterprises.

The tension between the state and the market was so high in the process of implementing "Project Breaking Point" that the media compared the dismantling of textile spindles in Shanghai to "a warrior cutting off his wounded arm."²⁰ Although the state controlled media intended to use the metaphor to invoke a heroic image of the SOEs and their workers who were willing to take the sacrifices, the metaphor also alluded to the state's desperation and lack of recourses. By introducing market mechanisms to the economy in the post-1978 reform era, the state exposed the SOEs in the textile and apparel industries to market competitions and consequently worsened the internal problems of the SOEs; and to prevent the "wound" from infecting the entire "body" of the economy, the best defense the state came up with was to "cut off the wounded arm." As a result, hundreds of factories were closed, over one million workers lost their jobs, and billions of *yuan* were spent on bad loans and compensation. This metaphor is a good illustration of the painful adjustments that China's textile and apparel industries have gone through on the one hand and the tension between the state and the market on the other.

However, the tension between the state and the market and the shift from a controlled economy to a market economy should not be taken to mean that the role of the state was or is insignificant in China. On the contrary, market mechanisms were not part of the Chinese economy until they were introduced and cultivated by the state in the reform era. In each of the three phases of the market reforms in the textile and apparel industries, the state played a crucial

²⁰ See Zhongguofangzhibao (Chinese Textile News) January 26, 1998.

role in allowing, inducing, and facilitating the growth of the market. Attesting to the role of the state, the non-state owned sectors emerged in leaps (as surges or booms) rather than developing gradually. That is to say, the Chinese state did not always passively react to the market forces, but actively brought about market competition. In the course of the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, the market relied on the support of the state. Even in the market based economy today, the state is not completely out of the picture. In fact, the Chinese state still intends to maintain some form of control over the market, not so much in the specific taxes, laws, and regulations, etc., but an ideological control, as it calls the economic system the “socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics.”

To what extent that the ideological label matters is a question that remains to be answered. As discussed previously, the state was reluctant to fully allow the market to replace the fundamental role of state planning in the 1980s. It was Deng’s remarks in 1992 that seemed to have temporarily settled the ideological debate between socialist planned economy and capitalist market economy. But the fundamental contradiction between the socialist ideology and economic base still exists in China. In the case of the textile and apparel industries, about 90 percent of the industries are non-state owned, which are by no means “socialist.” Yet, the Chinese Communist Party openly insists on a socialist ideology and the Marxist doctrine that the economic base determines the superstructure (including ideology). Therefore, it is hard to determine whether the state intends to use the label of its economic system as a compromise—it’s not really a socialist economy, but market economy with Chinese characteristics, or a promise—the market economy is but a practical means to eventually realize socialism in China. One thing is clear: as long as the Chinese Communist Party remains in power in China, the relationship between the state and the market will remain quite complicated. Differently put, the

state and the market both have played and will continue to play important roles in the development of China's textile and apparel industries.

2.7 CONCLUSION

From a shortage economy in which cloth was rationed for the three decades in the early years of the PRC's existence, to being the world's largest manufacturer of clothing today, the development of China's textile and apparel industries is nothing but a story of miraculous growth. The process, however, was not always a smooth upward curve, but punctuated with structural shifts and adjustments. The founding of the PRC led to the nationalization of China's economy, which resulted in a state controlled planned economic system, which in turn expeditiously created an economy of scale in the textile industry. The clothing industry started to take off after the state and the Communist Party adopted economic reform policies in favor of the market in 1978. In the post-1978 reform period, the textile and apparel industries as well as the Chinese economy as a whole gradually shifted from a centrally controlled planned economy to a market based economy. In the process of this shift, the Chinese state played a key role in cultivating, facilitating, and encouraging the growth of the market. Yet, once the ball of the market mechanism started rolling, its momentum demanded from the state further reforms in favor of the market. Although the market appeared to "get its way" in the course of China's economic reform, it did so not without hesitancy or even resistance from elements of the state. The Chinese Communist Party's insistence on the socialist ideology was and will be a source of tension between market forces and the state (as well as between their agents). There is no way to know how exactly the tension will unfold in the future, but in the course of the development of

the textile and apparel industries to this day, we can conclude that the state and market forces constitute two major axes that have charted the course of change of the industries.

The dynamic and sometimes contentious relationship between market forces and the state (sometimes represented by different elements of the state apparatus that advocate for the interests of the market and the state) suggests that the development of China's textile and apparel industries is not a natural economic growth, but an economic growth that reflects the will and wishes of the Chinese state and the Communist Party. In other words, the development of the textile and apparel industries is a part of the Chinese state's overall project of economic development and modernization. The state and the market are two major forces that shape the broad changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry that I discuss throughout this dissertation. In some cases, they are not just broad forces that are lurking in the background. In the next chapter, for example, the Chinese state (through its agents) is also involved in the changes of clothing styles and in making sense out of the stylistic changes in contemporary China.

3.0 EVOLUTION OF CLOTHING STYLES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: A TALE OF MODERNITY?

We are modern not only because we have achieved this status historically, but because we have developed consciousness of our historical depths and trajectories, as also our historical transcendence of the traditional—Nicholas B. Dirks (1990: 25).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

On October 21, 2001, when the then Chinese president Jiang Zemin along with other Asia-Pacific heads of state wore brightly-colored “traditional” Chinese silk jackets for the official APEC photo shoot,²¹ he brought about a craze for “traditionally” looking clothing in China, which was dubbed by the media “*tangzhuang re*” (literally meaning the heat of “Tang dynasty clothing”). These APEC jackets, according to the state spokesperson Zhang Qiyue, reflected “both traditional Chinese flavor and modern ideals” (*China Daily* 10/21/2001). The Malaysian *New Straits Times* also called them “an updated version of a traditional Chinese jacket”

²¹ It is an APEC convention that on the final day summit, the heads of state attending the conference would wear a traditional garment presented by the host country.

(10/21/2001). The *tangzhuang*, the name of the APEC jackets, suggests that the style dates back to the Tang dynasty (618-907), which was arguably the greatest period in China's long, proud, and glorious history. However, it is precisely the explicit association to the tradition of the Tang dynasty that has caused debates between the original designers of the jackets and dress historians. One of the original designers thought it was all right to call the jacket the "*tangzhuang*" because it symbolized something "Chinese," just as overseas Chinese are called "*tangren*," and China town "*tangren jie*" (personal interview in 2002). Dress historians, on the other hand, believed the name was a misnomer because the style of the jacket bore greater resemblance to "*magua*," a popular style in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911),²² than clothing styles in the Tang dynasty. Other designers on the original team took a "middle ground" approach and later "corrected" the name into "*xin tangzhuang*" (or new *tangzhuang*), emphasizing the new and modern aspects of the jacket.²³

The phenomenon of the *tangzhuang* craze and the debates surrounding the name raise important and interesting questions: What are considered traditional and/or modern styles of clothing by the fashion designers and dress historians? How can a clothing style be conceived as simultaneously traditional and modern, two attributes that are frequently considered as opposites? What can clothing styles and their representations tell us about modernity as well as tradition in China? This chapter attempts to address the above questions by examining the ways in which clothing styles are entwined with the broad social and political conditions in contemporary China. In the following, I will outline the evolution of clothing styles in the four

²² There were several news reports on scholars' disagreement on the use of the term of the "*tangzhuang*." See Jiefang ribao 10/22/2001; Beijing qingnianbao 02/10/2002.

²³ One of the original designers I interviewed holds this view, which is also reflected in the title of a book the team published, see Ding 2002.

major historical periods in contemporary China. In presenting the changes in clothing styles through time, I will also highlight the changes in politics in the corresponding historical periods. Then, I will analyze Chinese official representations of the evolution of contemporary clothing styles, and examine the ways in which a moral tale of progress and modernization is constructed through these representations. I argue that it is through such representations and discourses that clothing becomes more than something that merely provides covering and livelihood (see Chapter 2) for the Chinese citizens, and that time, modernity and their associated morality are woven into clothing styles. In her study of Chinese modernity, Lisa Rofel borrows Clifford Geertz's phrase and defines Chinese modernity as "a story people tell themselves about themselves in relation to others" (1999: 130). However, the moral I find of the story told by the Chinese via clothing is not so much that they see their modernity "in relation to others," instead they see it in relation to their own past. Given the numerous scholarly uses and interpretations of modernity, some explanation about my use of the term in this chapter is in order.

3.2 MODERNITY AND TEMPORALITY

In a review of anthropology and modernity, Joel Kahn states that in Anglophone social science the term "modern derives much of its meaning" from modernization theory (2001: 657), which bears significant resemblance to the theory of unilineal evolutionism and is widely criticized by anthropologists as being Eurocentric (also see Tipps 1973). Yet according to Kahn, recent anthropological studies have "substantially pluralized and relativized" the concept of modernity (Kahn 2001: 651). Indeed, different models have been proposed to study modernity, particularly

in non-Western settings, to name but a few: “alternative modernity” (Knauff 2002), “other modernities” (Rofel 1999), and even “multiple modernities” (Hefner 1998).

These recent anthropological studies of modernity have not only redirected scholarly attention to the topic of modernity, but have also enriched our understanding by embedding modernity in specific cultural contexts and experiences. However, Kahn is not satisfied with the frameworks of “alternative” or “other modernities” because they entail that the differences between the West and the rest are irreconcilable so much so that modernity must be locally embedded. He contends that modernity is not only plural in non-Western societies as the “alternative” and “other” modernity models suggest, but it is also plural in the West. Therefore, he argues that it is fruitful to engage critical studies of Western modernity in the anthropological studies of modernity in non-Western settings (Kahn 2001). Similar to Kahn, I am not totally convinced by the model of “alternative” or “other modernities,” not because it highlights the differences between the West and the rest, but because it invokes some form of orthodox modernity, which lies in the West, against which the modes of other or alternative modernities are always implicitly or explicitly juxtaposed.

It is noteworthy that modernity has been interpreted in many different ways in Western scholarship (as also alluded to by Kahn): industrialization, democratization, bureaucratization, secularism, capitalism, rationalism, scientism, individualism, and the list can go on and on. Differently put by James Faubion, “modernity is, if nothing else, multidimensional” (1988: 365). However, it is not the intent of this chapter to sort out the various dimensions and/or interpretations of modernity and to conclude with the most determinant dimension of modernity (if it is at all possible). Rather than focusing on the differences between the diverse perspectives and interpretations, this chapter limits its scope to one aspect of modernity on which scholars

seem to largely agree: the temporal dimension. Once again, Faubion's words are illustrative of the point, though he clearly recognizes the difficulty in defining what modernity is. He notes, "The indeterminacy of the modern is, however, commensurate with the indeterminacy of the objects (or whatever they might be) to which talk of modernity almost invariably alludes: the present; and the self" (1988: 366). In other words, the modern or modernity has to do with the self's sense of the present.

The modern age in the West, according to Habermas (1987), began with the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the discovery of the New World, which gave rise to a new sense of the present, i.e., modernity. Anthropologist Daniel Miller also argues that the key to modernity is that it indicates "a transformation in temporary consciousness" (1994: 13). That is to say, it is the shift in temporal consciousness—a new sense of the present in opposition to the past where tradition claims to reside—that marks out modernity. Therefore, from the vantage point of the temporal dimension, modernity as a heightened sense of the present is considered in Western scholarship as a rupture with tradition that claims to belong to the past, even though some specific traditions may be invented or reinvented in the present (c.f. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The rupture of modernity can be reflected in various ways. For example, according to Arjun Appadurai, the consciousness of the present is heightened by the "work of imagination" that is intensified by electronic mediation and transnational migration (1996: 3). Consequently he sees the rupture of modernity with the past in that the modern and the global are now in intense confluence, which he calls "modernity at large" (1996). In this chapter, I examine the ways in which temporality (and its ruptures) is objectified in and through the evolution of clothing styles in contemporary China.

3.3 CLOTHING STYLES AND MORALITY OF TIME

Clothing styles may seem trivial at first sight, but style in general is always important, both intellectually and aesthetically. As Alfred Kroeber points out, “The derivation of the word style is of course from stylus, the ancient writing tool, used metaphorically to express the individual manner peculiar to a writer” (Kroeber 1963: 66). The meaning of the term extends from the style of one’s handwriting (or calligraphy), which could be examined aesthetically, to the style of one’s individual ways of expression in writing, which is to be appreciated intellectually. Similarly, clothing styles require both aesthetic and intellectual appreciation. Indeed, the role of fashion designers parallels with the role of authors versus writers,²⁴ in that fashion designers use the medium of fabrics in place of words to express their individual styles, a point that will be discussed in the next chapter. The focus of this chapter is, however, on the social and historical aspects of clothing styles, the very aspects Kroeber emphasizes. He writes,

So far, we have the original meaning attaching to the word style; and this meaning with reference to individuals has never died out. In addition, however, with lapse of time the word style has come also to denote a social or historical phenomenon, the manner or set of related patterns common to the writers or musicians or painters of a period or country (Kroeber 1963: 66).

Indeed, by examining stylistic changes in Western women’s dress in long periods of time that exceed the lifespan of individual designers (Kroeber 1919; also Richardson and Kroeber 1940),²⁵ Kroeber finds that the patterns in the stylistic changes in women’s dress indicate that individuals

²⁴ Geertz’s (1988) distinction between writer and author is relevant here, but will be discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁵ To analyze the stylistic changes, Richardson and Kroeber took six measurements of a dress: skirt length, waist length, décolletage length, skirt width, waist width, and décolletage width (Richardson and Kroeber 1940: 112).

are “immersed in a cultural matrix that predetermined most of their conceptualization and behavior” (Lowe and Lowe 1982: 527). To be clear, the “cultural matrix” Kroeber refers to, which shapes the individuals in their creations of styles, is not equivalent to the external social and political conditions in which they live. Kroeber thinks that stylistic changes are largely dictated by and within “the structure of fashion,” and “the unsettling larger influences [*only*] impinge on them [fashions]” (emphasis added) (1957: 19). In other words, Kroeber seems to acknowledge a relative autonomy within the fashion industry, a point will be further discussed in the next chapter. Kroeber’s limited acknowledgement of the influence of external social and political forces on fashion change may be in part due to the fact that he examined changes in only one particular style (women’s dress), and thus the changes appeared to be “a slow pendulum-like swing between extremes” (Kroeber 1957: 9). Should he have had examined changes of multiple styles over longer historical periods that underwent more dramatic social and political transformations, fashion styles might not have appeared to be a simple approximation of or deviation from an ideal “equilibrium.” That being said, the academic vigor Kroeber accords fashion and his insight that external social and political forces have bearings on fashion change are valuable to my current study of stylistic changes in contemporary Chinese clothing.

Indeed, in the following section, I will examine how temporality comes to bear on Chinese clothing styles through the correlation between clothing styles and the historical, social and political environments in which they exist or existed in contemporary China.²⁶

²⁶ Here contemporary means from late Qing to the present.

3.4 EVOLUTION OF CLOTHING STYLES IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Since late 19th century, clothing styles have undergone dramatic changes in China,²⁷ not in terms of the cyclical change of fashion, but historical changes that are enmeshed with politics. Perhaps because of the largely linear nature of the stylistic changes of clothing in contemporary China, dress historians commonly illustrate the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing as predicated on the four historical periods: late Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the Republican period (1912-1949), the Maoist or radical socialist period (1949-1976), and the Reform era (post-1978). In what follows, I will follow this convention to describe the evolution of clothing styles in contemporary China, underscoring the connection between clothing styles and their respective social and political contexts in each period.

3.4.1 Late Qing

As the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, like many of its predecessors, maintained a rigid clothing code for its rulers and subjects alike. The elaborate sumptuary rules of the imperial family have been well documented (e.g., Garrett 1994: 29-61). Similarly, the Qing mandarins and subjects were supposed to dress according to their rank and status. This hierarchical way of dressing was not only legitimized by law, but also policed by moral scrutiny: A person who dressed appropriately knew his or her place in society, which pertained to the Confucian concept of *li* (a concept that is similar to but includes more than simply etiquette); otherwise he or she would be no different from uncivilized barbarians (Steele and Major 1999: 18). Therefore, clothing was

²⁷ In this chapter, my discussion of Chinese clothing is limited to clothing of the Han, and does not include clothing of the ethnic minorities except for the Manchu.

not just a reflection of one's inner quality, but also an integral part of the imperial social order that was governed by the system of *li*, as an old Chinese phrase goes, “*chui yi chang er tian xia zhi*,” which means “[as long as] the clothing system is maintained, the social order is maintained.”

However, to the above general characterization of clothing in the Qing dynasty, I have to add three caveats. Firstly, the legal and moral constraints on clothing did not exclude possibilities of violation or transgression. Wu (2005) did a study on the consumption behavior of wealthy families with lower ranks in the Jiangnan region in the Ming and Qing dynasties and he found that “*jian yue*,” consumption behaviors that transgressed the parameter of one's rank or status, were fairly common. Secondly, sartorial distinctions in this period were mainly reflected through color, fabric, patterns, embroideries, and ornaments and accessories, but not through clothing styles *per se*. The main styles for men were the *changpao* (or *cheongsam*), *magua* (the Qing style jacket), a hat (skullcap), and a long queue (in a single plait); and the main clothing style for Manchu women was also *cheongsam* or the *qipao*, but blouses and long skirts (frequently worn with pants underneath), and often bound “lotus feet” for Han women.²⁸ The cut, silhouettes, and the styles of clothing were rather limited during much of the Qing period. Lastly, new styles and demands for change began to emerge in the late Qing. Historians have argued that “*jianbian yifu*” (cutting men's queues and changing their clothing styles) as well as the women's “natural feet movement” (*tianzu yundong*) were part of the revolution that led to the collapse of the Qing and the establishment of the Republican China (*Zhonghua minguo*).²⁹

²⁸ Dorothy Ko sees foot-binding as a form of attire, see Ko 1997.

²⁹ This is a view presented in Chinese textbooks (e.g. An & Jin 1999: 7-8), which is shared by many dress historians. Gerth (2003) also details how the removal of the queue was central to the collapse of the Qing dynasty, also see Wang 2003: 64-70.

Following the contact with Japan, a rising power, and Western imperial powers (including the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Australia, Italy, and Russia) in the late Qing, Western clothing styles started to gain popularity, so much so that a group of tailors called “*hongbang caifeng*” from the Zhejiang and Shanghai areas became well known for their fine skills in making Western styles of clothing.³⁰

3.4.2 The Republican Period

After the demise of the Qing and the establishment of the Republican government, Western styles of clothing, such as Western suits, became even more popular, since they were legalized by the new government as one of the formal attire, or *lifu*, in October 1912. The *changpao* or *cheongsam* was also officially included as formal wear, as the new Republican government yielded to the pressure of the domestic silk industry (Wang 2003: 89-94; Gerth 2003: 68-121). In addition to the two different types of clothing, the Republican era is particularly identified with the invention and popularity of the “*zhongshanzhuang*” (for men) and the “*qipao*” (for women). The popularity of these two styles made them the *lifu* of Republican period by default, a legacy still in evidence today.³¹ Elsewhere I have discussed how the *qipao* was reformed and appropriated by Han Chinese women during the Republican era (Zhao 2004). Professor Bao Minxin, in his monograph on the *qipao*, details four major differences between Han women’s

³⁰ They were also called “*feng bang cai feng*,” as they were originally from Fengtian, Zhejiang and then migrated to Shanghai area.

³¹ Japanese dress scholar Yamanouchi Chiemi (in Chinese Shanneizhihuimei) surveyed 61 individuals in Xi’an and Shanghai on the issue of national dress in 1997, and most of them thought the *qipao* and the *zhongshanzhuang* was or should be the Chinese national dress (2001: 6).

reformed *qipao* in the Republican era and its Manchu predecessor in the Qing dynasty, ranging from silhouettes, fabrics and patterns, ensemble, to status symbolism (1998: 11-14).

Here, I want to emphasize that the silhouettes or appearance differ between the two versions—the Han women’s *qipao* in the Republican period was more fitted and revealing and the Manchu version was baggier and concealing—because the former incorporated Western design techniques, such as darts, set-in sleeves, shoulder pads, etc. In terms of cut, structure, and construction, Han women’s reformed *qipao* of the Republican period was very different from the Manchu *qipao*; the former utilized techniques of *liti caijian* (three dimensional cutting) while the latter employed only *pingmian caijian* (two dimensional cutting) techniques. The differences between the two types of cutting techniques will be further illustrated later in this chapter, but the point I want to make here is that the adoption of Western design techniques did not make the *qipao* less Chinese. On the contrary, in the face of these changes the *qipao* became a Chinese cultural icon. Similarly, the making of the *zhongshanzhuang* also included some of the Western design techniques. Some dress historians even acknowledge the influences of “*qiling wenzhuang*,” a jacket worn by many overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and Japanese student uniforms, on the style of the *zhongshanzhuang* (Wang 2003: 96-101; An and Jin1999: 29-32). The promotion of the *zhongshanzhuang* by Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen, who named the style after himself), Father of Republican China, and the symbolisms of his revolutionary ideals as represented by different features of the jacket have no doubt contributed to its quick reception by the Chinese as truly their own style.³²

³² For details of the symbolisms, see Wang 2003: 98.

To summarize, the Republican period experienced a real plurality of clothing styles; three distinct genres coexisted: *changpao* and *magua* from the Qing dynasty, Western styles clothing such as Western suits (continued through the late Qing), and new inventions of the *qipao* and the *zhongshanzhuang* (as hybrids of the first two genres).

3.4.3 The Mao Era

After the Mao Zedong led Chinese Communist Party defeated the Guomindang (or KMT) Republican government, the People's Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949. Because of the economic reforms introduced since the end of 1978, the PRC is often divided into two periods: the radical socialist period, or the Mao era (1949-76), and the reform period (post-1978). This historical division is also meaningful in terms of sartorial changes in the PRC. The Mao era is known in the West for one particular clothing style, the ubiquitous and unisex Mao suit. Media reports and video clips of mass movements in the Maoist China always gave the impression of “a sea of blue ants” (or “green ants” during the Cultural Revolution).³³ Although there is some truth to those images, they do not capture the entire sartorial picture of the Maoist period.

In the 1950s, clothing styles from the Republican period such as the *qipao* and the *zhongshanzhuang* continued to be worn by many people. In fact, unlike the Qing and the Republican governments, the PRC government never issued any laws or regulations pertaining to clothing. However, this is not to suggest that there was no connection between the dwindling popularity of the *qipao* and the Western suits and the overall political environment in which the

³³ These images lend conveniently to interpretations of a totalitarian, brain-washed, communist other.

proletarian ideology dominated. According to A. C. Scott, the waning popularity of the *qipao* was because the people “tacitly understood” that “it was not patriotic to dress smartly” so that they put away their elegant *qipao* along with their silk stockings and high heeled shoes and wore their shabbiest clothes (1965: 130). Garrett also shows historical evidence that the *qipao* was tolerated in the PRC until 1965 (1994: 106). It was not until the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when the *qipao* and Western suits were labeled as belonging to the “four olds” (*sijiu*),³⁴ and so that they were completely abandoned and in some cases destroyed (An and Jin 1999: 82; Steele and Major 1999: 59-60). High profile cases included Wang Guangmei, wife of Chairman Liu Shaoqi, who was forced to dress in the *qipao* with a necklace of *pingpong* balls and was interrogated and ridiculed by the red guards during a class struggle session, which was recorded in photographs and video documentaries.

Political campaigns such as the Cultural Revolution without a doubt had impoverished Chinese clothing styles. However, the impoverishment, and to a great extent, the uniformity, was not primarily achieved by forceful means as scenes of frequent violence during this period would suggest (cf. Kunz 1996). Wilson argues that the discursive power of the state-initiated discourse of “*pusu*” (frugality) and the creation of role models of both cadres and ordinary people (such as Lei Feng) who lived frugal lifestyles significantly contributed to setting up moral restraints against lavish dressing (1999: 170-174). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, the situation during this period was exacerbated by the shortage of fiber and fabrics, as well as China’s attempts to solve the shortage problem by creating large scale textile plants, which consequently resulted in greater “uniformity” in fabrics as those plants produced the same fabrics in large quantities and had no incentives or “directives” to diversify their products. Thus, the

³⁴ They include old thinking, old culture, old customs, and old behaviors.

politics, the economy, and the discursive power of the discourse of *pusu* all contributed to the paucity of clothing styles during the Maoist period. Even so, that the Chinese all wore the Mao suit was not an accurate description of the Maoist era, and not even of the Cultural Revolution decade.

The “Mao suit” known to the West was and is called the *zhongshanzhuang* in China, or more precisely the “Mao style *zhongshanzhuang*.” This style was a reformed version of Sun Yat-sen’s. In the early 1950s, the central government transferred a group of “*hongbang caifeng*,” the group of tailors who made Sun’s version of the suit, from Shanghai to Beijing and formed a plant called “Hongdu” (red capital) specifically for the purpose of making garments for top government officials (Wang 2003: 169). The Mao suit was the work of these tailors. The differences between the Mao style jackets and the Sun Yat-sen jackets were mainly in the collar and fabric: the former had wider and looser collars and used all sorts of cheaper materials available at the time (mainly cotton and synthetic materials), while the latter had smaller and tighter collars and were mostly made of wool (primarily imported then). Differently put, the Mao jacket was a “proletarian” version of Sun’s *zhongshanzhuang*. Mao’s status and charisma probably had a lot to do with the popularity of the style and the misnomer.

Even though the Mao suit was very common among China’s civilian population and very similar to the military uniform,³⁵ it was not a uniform for the civilians. According to Verity Wilson, no dress regulations were promulgated during this period (1999: 174). In addition to the Mao style *zhongshanzhuang*, *qingnianzhuang* (the youth style) and *junbianzhuang* (the casual military style) were also very popular during the 1960s. Together the three styles were called the

³⁵ The military uniform is also *zhongshanzhuang* in style, but includes the military paraphernalia, including the buttons, badges, hat, and belt.

laosanzhuang or the “three old styles,” and all of them bore great resemblance to Sun’s original version of *zhongshanzhuang* (An and Jin 1999: 82). Common colors of clothing in this period included blue, grey, and black, which constituted the *laosanse* or the “three old colors” (*ibid*). Green also became very popular when the red guards appropriated the military styles during the Cultural Revolution. Evidently, there was not a great variety of clothing styles and colors during the radical socialist period. Yet, ordinary people were still able to express their personal tastes and choices in muted and nuanced ways, a point made by Verity Wilson that deserves to be quoted at length:

It was one of the ways people were able to engage in banter in a state system where gossip could be synonymous with informing. Dress concerns, of this sort at least, were seen as a relatively safe arena for exercising judgment, skill, and choice. The placement of pockets, the stitching of a seam, the depth of a collar and the suitability of the buttons were all details to engage the discerning dresser. A personal touch could be instilled by striped gloves knitted from leftover pieces of wool, and hand-knitted jumpers themselves could be uniquely fashioned...Even Mao badges, those most ideologically correct accessories, could be collected, swapped, pinned at various angles and in varying formations (1999: 174).

3.4.4 The Reform Period

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978 is one of the epoch-marking events in contemporary China. Although there was no regime change as in the previous three periods, the post-Mao Chinese state adopted a new policy called “*duinei gaige, duiwai kaifang*,” which means “domestically implement economic reforms” and

“open doors to the international communities.” Subsequently, the state moved away from the political and ideological struggles of the Maoist era to a renewed focus on economic development,³⁶ which also entailed learning from the developed West. Chapter 2 illustrated how China’s economic reforms gradually led to a market-based economy through the example of the textile and clothing industries. Here, I focus on what the reforms mean to what people wear.

The CCP’s attempt to settle ideological debates and move onto economic development did not immediately translate into a situation of “anything goes” in terms of people’s clothing styles. In the early 1980s, people were still rather conservative with regard to what they wore, partly because of the lingering effects of previous ideological struggles and the overall morality of “*jianku pusu*” (austerity and frugality), and partly because new clothing styles were not yet readily available. One popular type of clothing that was unique to the 1980s was “*chun qiu liang yong zhuang*” (double-use spring and fall wear), which generally referred to jackets and shirts that could be worn in the two seasons of spring and fall. The uniqueness of this type of clothing lay in its name and functionality rather than its stylistic characteristics, which suggested that an overall abundance of garments was yet to come. As far as the early 1980s is concerned, the *zhongshanzhuang* and its various versions still ruled the scene. Compared to the “conservative” general public, top Communist Party leaders were at the vanguard in their attire. The return of Western suits was the result of personal promotion by party secretaries Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang (successor of Hu). On one occasion, Hu said,

...Don’t neglect the reform in lifestyles. Lifestyle has to change according to the changes in the means of production. Social revolution is historically linked to and

³⁶ Ideological debates and discourses did not go away entirely, and sometimes they even made strong comebacks. The repression of the 1989 Tian’anmen incident is a key example.

even frequently starts with the reform in lifestyles. For example, Mr. Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) led the revolution and overthrew the Qing dynasty. He abandoned the *changpao* and *magua*, and promoted the *zhongshanzhuang*, [and ordered] men to cut their queues...We have to adapt to the development of modernization, [we] should not be afraid to reform our lifestyles, and [we] should not be bound by backward stuff [he used the term *dongxi*, which included ideas, habits, etc.]. Take eating for example, in our old tradition, eight or ten people eat from the same plate. Why can't we share and eat from our own plate? Take clothing for another instance, Western suits are convenient, why not promote them? (*Yearbook of Shanghai Clothing* 1985: 1)

The fact that the top party official had to come out and make such comments points to the powerful effect previous ideologies, which he referred to as the “backward stuff,” have had on people's attire. Paradoxically, to unshackle constraints of the previous ideologies, he had to use the same line of reasoning and emphasized that ideology was linked to what people wore, and hence he proposed that people's clothing styles and lifestyles in general should change as they were integral parts of the nation's reform agenda and modernization project. Therefore, his comments sent the message that it was “politically correct” to wear fashionable clothing, and in effect he turned choices of clothing into principally practical and personal rather than ideological matters.

Evidently Hu's efforts (as well as other party officials' efforts) have worked; the *xifu* or the *xizhuang*, general terms for all types of Western suits but most commonly for the tuxedo, have not only become the formal wear of government officials, but also a sought-after style for

the civilian population.³⁷ In fact, the overall trend toward formal styles, as represented particularly by Western suits, was so prevalent at the end of the 1980s that it was not uncommon to see migrant workers wearing Western suits or sport jackets as they worked on construction projects or performed other types of manual labor, which often became the laughingstock of the fashion-savvy urbanites. One frequently ridiculed outfit of the migrant workers, who are from the countryside, is an ensemble of dark Western suits and white sneakers (the style sometimes worn by U.S. comedian Ellen DeGeneres), which is considered by the urbanites to be inappropriate at best, but more often “*tu*” or “*tuqi*,” or “*ba*” in Shanghai dialect. “*Tu*” means earth, in this context, it is used as an adjective, meaning earthy, backwards, unfashionable, and that which is associated with the countryside and the peasants. The opposite of “*tu*” is “*yang*” or “*yangqi*,” which means fashionable, modern, and that which pertains to the foreign and the West in particular. Therefore, the two terms of “*tu*” and “*yang*” are not only descriptive of fashion styles, but also indicative of the level of one’s inner quality or “*suzhi*,” in this case, backward vs. modern, narrow-minded vs. open-minded, rural vs. urban, and finally low-*suzhi* vs. high-*suzhi*. Ironically, however, the Western suit as an imported style, which is supposed to be inherently modern and fashionable, when worn by migrant peasant workers turns into something unfashionable and backwards. Even more ironic, when the same outfit (a Western suit and white sneakers) was worn by Andy Lau (Liu Dehua), a Hong Kong superstar, no one seemed to have described him as *tu* or low-*suzhi*. Thus, what the Western suit means varies depending on whom the wearer is and the context in which it is worn. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Western suits have staged a major comeback in China since the late 1980s.

³⁷ The military uniforms remain more or less the same; they still bear great resemblance to the *zhongshanzhuang* style.

Another major comeback in the reform period was the *qipao*. However, it is generally acknowledged that the craze for the *qipao* in the late 1980s was short lived (Bao 1998; Finnane 1996: 125). Since then, the *qipao* was commonly worn by hotel staff and other young women working in the service industry, but only worn by middle class women during formal occasions as a fashion item and/or a formal dress. While Finnane thinks that the inconvenience of the *qipao* is to blame for its diminishing popularity as it is unsuited for the fast tempo of modern life (1996: 125), others believe that the *qipao* has been elevated to the status of the “national formal dress” (Bao 1998) and “a signifier of cultural identity” in mainland China (Clark 1999: 164).³⁸ As a matter of fact, many Chinese women today choose to wear the *qipao* for their weddings or the shooting of their wedding pictures (Constable 2006). The *qipao* shops, some of which are rather upscale, are frequently seen at tourist spots in mainland China and Hong Kong. As a cultural icon of China, the *qipao* has also been adopted by high fashion both within and outside China.

In addition to the revival of Western suits and the *qipao*, new styles were slowly but surely catching on, initially through Hong Kong (and the influence of its popular movies) and the newly opened-up south and coastal areas. Bell bottoms were popular for a few years and quickly gave way to jeans and skirts. T-shirts also became popular, acquiring an interesting name of “*wenhua shan*” (cultural shirt), frequently carrying sometimes funny, nonsensical, or politically subversive messages (Barme 1999: 145-178). More often than not, the messages were written in foreign languages, primarily English, but they frequently did not make any sense due to misspellings. In this context, the form that appears to be “*yang*,” or foreign and modern, seems to matter more than the actual content and meaning of the message; a similar pattern has been

³⁸ The *qipao* is considered as a “symbol of cultural identity” beyond mainland China, such as in Hong Kong, Singapore and other overseas Chinese communities; see Chua 2000, and *Hong Kong Fashion History* 1992.

observed by Nicole Constable in her study of Chinese bridal pictures that often bear English captions (Constable 2006). In terms of clothing styles, jeans and T-shirts have marked a trend toward casual styles of clothing since the late 1980s, a trend that was also supported by an emerging interest in sports and outdoor activities (Brownell 1995). Besides professional sports wear (such as international brands Nike, Adidas, Puma, and the domestic brand Lining), “casual” and sportswear also emerged in everyday life: tights and bikinis became acceptable and even popular;³⁹ jumpers, jackets, and blazers all became good outerwear; wool sweaters and down jackets turned into essential items for the winter. While these trends continued, designer labels and imported brands started to pick up steam since the second half of the 1990s (Mr. Yuan’s clothing line described in Chapter 4 is an example), reflecting demands for new status markers and expression of individualistic tastes following increasing social stratification since the economic reforms took hold. At the turn of the 21st century, China has witnessed a renewed interest in retro styles, culminating in the *tangzhuang* craze in 2001 and 2002, thanks to the world leaders who wore the style at the 2001 APEC held in Shanghai, which was widely covered by domestic and international media.

Evidently, clothing styles in the Reform period have experienced tremendous diversification as compared to those in the Maoist era. While this process continues to evolve today, a few major trends can be spotted. First, formal wear, as represented by “*zhiyezhuang*” (office wear), a trend that has evolved from the popularity of Western suits (*xizhuang*) in the 1980s, remains a major category of everyday wear today. Second, casual and sports wear have become increasingly popular, even to the extent of becoming the dominant style among the

³⁹ Susan Brownell has an interesting discussion of the bikinis debates in the mid 1980s, which shows how the style emerged and became accepted. See Brownell 1995: 270-4.

younger population. Third, designer labels and imported brands have started to flourish since the late 1990s, catering to specific needs of individuals and groups. Last but not the least, various cultural or sub-cultural styles such as the grungy look and the punk look have become more common in China's urban centers.

From the evolution of major clothing styles in contemporary China outlined above, we can see that there are different characteristics in each of the four historical periods. The reform period is particularly different from the other three periods in contemporary China as far as clothing styles are concerned: while clothing styles were more stable and more closely tied to political ideologies in the previous periods (with the exception of certain urban areas in the Republican era), they are much more changeable, diverse, and relatively independent from political and ideological control in the reform era (yet more subject to market influences). If we apply Kawamura's notion of "fashion" as defined by changeability to the Chinese context, then fashion has only emerged in China in the reform era (Kawamura 2005). Not surprisingly, it is also in the reform period that Chinese fashion professionals such as fashion designers and models have emerged, which will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. However, the visible differences between the reform era (the present) and the three preceding periods (the past) are not to be glossed over as fashion vs. non-fashion, or modern clothing vs. traditional clothing. When referring to "traditional Chinese clothing" as well as modern clothing, Chinese fashion professionals have something particular in their minds, which is pertinent to the debates between the original fashion designers and dress historians on the *tangzhuang* introduced in the beginning of this chapter.

Although disagreements abound between Chinese dress historians and fashion designers with regard to the name and the style of the *tangzhuang*, they share a common ground—both

groups believe that the method of traditional Chinese clothing making or designing is conceptually different from the Western method. The traditional Chinese method is called “*pingmian caijian*,” which literally means “flat cutting” or “two-dimensional cutting.” By contrast, the Western method as perceived by the Chinese professionals and academics is called “*liti caijian*,” meaning “three-dimensional cutting.” Clothes made in the traditional Chinese way are flat or two-dimensional and not fitted to the body, whereas clothes designed and made in the Western way are three-dimensional and tend to have a better fit.

To put it differently, the two methods of garment making are defined by the different effects the finished garments give on the body, each involving a different set of design techniques. As boasted by the original designers of the APEC jackets, the *tangzhuang* jackets are modern in part because Western design techniques such as “draping,” “darts” (*sheng*) and “set-in sleeves” (*zhuangxiu*) have been adopted. During an interview, one of the original designers told me that the former Chinese president Jiang Zemin’s jacket was designed by using the technique of draping. In the absence of Jiang, they had to find someone with similar stature and they attached padding onto his belly and then draped the fabric over him in order to cut it. This example shows that Western design techniques such as draping, darts, and set-in sleeves use fabrics to sculpt and/or to accentuate certain parts of the body.

The traditional Chinese “flat cutting” method, by contrast, conceptualizes the body as a flat surface that does not require draping. Similarly, the traditional Chinese method does not allow darts on the front and back panels of the garments, as they would create an uneven surface and/or accentuate certain parts of the body. According to this method, the measurements of the girths of the body are translated into width, and the differences between the girths of the chest, the waist, and the hip are not subtly considered. Consequently, the finished garment gives a flat

and frequently baggy look. Moreover, the “set-in sleeves” (*zhuangxiu*) are not traditionally Chinese either, as they are cut and made separately and then sewn onto the bodice, giving the shoulders a more defined look (sometimes with the help of shoulder pads). By contrast, the traditional Chinese style sleeves, or “*lianxiu*,” are cut as a part of the bodice, which gives the shoulder a natural slope and often a baggy look as well. Therefore, the adoption of draping, darts, and set-in sleeves in the construction of the APEC jackets make them more fitted than they would if only traditional Chinese design techniques had been utilized.

That much is agreed on by both Chinese fashion designers and dress historians. Yet, their views diverge when it comes to the treatment of the specific design techniques. The Chinese designers are eclectic in choosing their techniques to design garments that appear to be traditional, like those APEC *tangzhuang* jackets, which many characterize as traditional Chinese clothing. In contrast, many Chinese scholars believe that the two sets of design techniques are fundamental to the divergence between traditional Chinese style and Western style clothing (e.g., Tang 2002; Zhang 2001: 110-111). They insist that traditional Chinese style clothing has to be made with traditional Chinese flat cutting techniques, so much so that they argue that the *tangzhuang* jackets are “*jia gudong*” (fake antiques). Some were particularly bothered by the contradiction that the name of the *tangzhuang* alluded to the Tang dynasty (618-907), but the style of the APEC jackets resembled more the *magua* style in the Qing dynasty than clothing styles in the Tang.

While I believe that the dress historians’ argument has the merit of bringing to light the “invented tradition” of the *tangzhuang*, insisting on the fundamental differences between Western and traditional Chinese design techniques and clothing styles is equally problematic, because such insistence leads to an essentialization that is not warranted by history. In fact, the

technique of darting was not used in Europe until somewhere between the 13th and 15th century (Zhang 2001: 60-2). On the other hand, darts and other three-dimensional design techniques had already become part of the Chinese design repertoire when the Chinese “*hongbang caifeng*” emerged in the late Qing. If borrowing of the three-dimensional design techniques by the Chinese creates “invented tradition,” then this invented tradition did not begin with the *tangzhuang*, but with the *hongbang caifeng*’s creation of the *zhongshanzhuang* (probably even earlier if we pursue further back in history).

Interestingly, few if any Chinese dress historians have questioned the “Chineseness” or the authenticity of the *zhongshanzhuang* or the Mao suit because of the Western design techniques involved in their creation. Therefore, classifying a clothing style as Chinese or Western, traditional or modern, is not simply a matter of technicality (i.e., the design techniques involved), it also has to do with the historical context in which the style is created and the way in which such history is written or narrated. In the following section, I will further probe the issue of tradition and modernity as related to Chinese clothing by analyzing the official representations of the evolution of contemporary clothing styles in China.

3.5 A TALE OF MODERNITY?

From the *changpao* and *magua* in the Qing dynasty to the diverse styles today as illustrated above, clothing styles in China have evolved tremendously, not in the form of cyclical change studied by Kroeber, but more in the form of linear progression along with the transition of the four historical periods in contemporary China (though some styles crosscut different periods). The linear rather than cyclical association between clothing styles and time lends itself to an

objectification of time. As it is shown below, the objectification of time is rendered most evidently in the Chinese official representations of the sartorial evolution in contemporary China. For that reason, the official representations of the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing styles are also narratives about time. As such, these narratives are at the same time “political acts” of ordering the past, the present, and the future (Fabian 1983: x). Indeed, the political moral of progress and modernization through time are deeply implicated in numerous textbooks and other official accounts of the sartorial evolution in contemporary China.

As a part of the “China Cultural Year” programs in Paris, which was sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and took place between October 2003 and July 2004, an exhibition of contemporary Chinese fashion was organized. In conjunction with the exhibition, a book was published in both French and Chinese, entitled *Costumes chinois: Modes depuis 100 ans* (Chinese Costumes: Fashions of the Past 100 Years). Yang Yuan, chief editor of the book, summarizes Chinese fashion in the past century in this way:

In the 20th century, the spiritual look of the Chinese changed dramatically; clothing fashions were closely connected to the changes of political events, and every shift and innovation in clothing represented the mode of the time. This is a century in which Chinese clothing went through (*zouxiang*) being traditional (*chuantong*) toward modernity (*xiandai*), and from being feudal (*fengjian*) toward openness (*kaifang*). It is also the golden age for Chinese clothing fashions, numerous fashions rose and fell, much more diversely and swiftly than any other time in Chinese history (2003: 10).

According to Yang, clothing is not just about one’s appearance or look, but it also reflects the “spiritual” outlook of the wearer. It is on the spiritual level that the changes in contemporary

Chinese clothing tell a moral story: the Chinese (hence the nation) are changing from being traditional toward modernity, from being feudal toward openness (*kaifang*). It is noteworthy that Yang did not use definitive past tense, instead he uses the term of “*zouxiang*,” which means “moving toward,” suggesting a progression through time and that the ultimate “modernity” and “openness” have yet to come. Meanwhile, he also emphasizes that the current situation is very exciting and encouraging because “we” are in a “golden age,” better than ever before. Therefore, Yang’s account tells a dark feudal past, a golden present, and a bright future, where modernity lies. Clothing bears the witness, indeed becomes the objectification of such an ordering of time. Thus, Yang’s narrative of the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing is also a story of progress and modernization.

In a similar way but with a clear Marxist overtone, Wang Zhao writes in the preface to a college textbook on the history of contemporary Chinese clothing,⁴⁰

The development of contemporary clothing followed the reforms in lifestyles (*shenghuo fangshi*). Historical developments and reforms of clothing all closely tied to the changes in lifestyles. Modern clothing, in particular, develops and changes under the pre-condition of reforms in life [styles] and [means of] production. Especially in the post-1990s, people’s lifestyles have changed greatly. Advanced means of production (*shengchan fangshi*), rich and colorful life, led to newer, more scientific, and more hygienic ideas in people’s attire and appearance, and consequently, in the new century the people in our great

⁴⁰ Textbooks of all levels are closely regulated by the government in China. Unlike college textbooks in the United States, Chinese textbooks are generally much more “standardized” and are used nationally.

motherland are wearing [clothes that reflects] the spirit of our time, cultural taste, national fashion, and artistic aura (An and Jin 1999: 2).

Evidently, Wang believes that clothing styles today are better than those in the past, which is consistent with Yang's account. But different from Yang, Wang explicitly attributes the progress in people's attire to the advancement of the "means of production," a Marxist concept, which is in synch with the Communist Party line as seen in Hu Yaobang's speech discussed earlier in this chapter. Given the fact that Wang's words appeared in a textbook, which is closely censored by the state, his Marxist overtone (and euphoria) is not surprising. A more important question is, as raised by both Yang's and Wang's accounts: Why does the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing styles have to indicate progress and modernization? Furthermore, how are the representations of contemporary Chinese clothing related to the way in which contemporary Chinese history in general is written in China?

As indicated in Chinese high school textbooks, contemporary Chinese history began when the first Opium War broke out in 1840,⁴¹ and this history is narrated as China's continuous quest for modernity.⁴² As the Chinese history goes, the quest includes the Nationalist revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, which overthrew the Qing dynasty but quickly fell into warlordism. Although Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's successor, was able to maintain control of the Republic of China for some years, it was the Communists who finally put an end to China's humiliating semi-colonial status and established a truly independent nation-state known as the People's Republic of China in 1949. According to official Chinese historiography, contemporary Chinese

⁴¹ The war ended with the loss of the Qing to the British, which marked the Qing's transition into a semi-colonial status.

⁴² This periodization follows the position of Chinese high school history textbooks. But if modernity is to be equated with capitalism, then it could be dated back to the first emergence of capitalist sprouts in the Ming dynasty as Spence (1990) suggests.

history is a continuous story of progress, modernization, and liberation, and the chaos of the Republican period and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) are but the trials and errors in the due process. My discussion of official Chinese historiography here is not to contest its historical accuracy, although it apparently adds certain logic to history and makes historical transitions appear smooth and inevitable. Instead, I want to draw attention to the coevalness of contemporary Chinese history, the history of contemporary Chinese clothing, and the rise of the Chinese nation-state. Benedict Anderson (1983) has taught us that nation-states such as the PRC are but “imagined communities.” Following Anderson, I think that the history of the establishment of Chinese nation-state is a historical construction and a dominant historiography that permeates all Chinese official historical narratives. Given the power of this dominant historiography and simultaneously experiencing the broad processes of nation-making, it is hard for Chinese such as Yang and Wang not to fit the story of sartorial evolution during this period right into the meta-narrative of modernization and liberation of the Chinese nation.

What, then, do the official representations of contemporary Chinese clothing and the dominant Chinese historiography in general tell us about Chinese modernity? The modernization narratives do not give a clear answer; they only suggest that Chinese modernization is a continuous process. But if “modernity” is not here and now, then where and what is it? In a study of Chinese modernity, Lisa Rofel treats modernity as “a located cultural imaginary, arising from and perpetuating relations of difference across an East-West divide” (1999: xii). As such, she thinks Chinese modernity is “a story people [the Chinese] tell themselves about themselves in relation to others [the West]” (1999:130). Thus the question becomes: Is the West of the present, real and/or imagined, what the Chinese believe to be their future modernity? The answer to the question requires some elaboration.

As the socialist PRC subscribes to Marxism, the Marxist teleology that places socialism and communism in a more advanced stage than the European capitalist societies seems to be a tempting point to locate the socialist version of modernity. Scholars have noted that radical socialist China fought for modernity by claiming an ideological high ground: “modern Marxism” (Rofel 1999: 25). It is true that the Chinese leaders had and still claim to have aspirations to reach the communist utopia one day, but the economic reality never convinced the Chinese, including the national leaders themselves that they were actually more advanced than the capitalist West, an illusion that was broken along with the failed Great Leap Forward campaign in 1958, which exacerbated, if not induced, the severe famines that killed millions of people in the following three years. It is perhaps surprising that it was Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Mao who first put forward the economically-oriented goal of “Four Modernizations” in various versions in the 1950s and the 1960s. The final version, as we know it today, of “agricultural modernization, industrial modernization, modernization of science and technology, and modernization of national defense,” first appeared in Zhou’s “Government Working Report” in December 1964 (Cao 2006). The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978 simply restated the “Four Modernizations” as the national goal to be reached through economic reforms. This suggests that even in the radical socialist period, the Chinese leaders recognized that China was still not modern and needed to be “modernized,” at least in materialist and economic terms. A predicament arose immediately for the Communist Party leaders: How could a nation be ideologically more advanced while at the same time more backward economically than the capitalist West? Isn’t it the Marxist dictate that the ideological superstructure is determined by the economic base? In the apparently paradoxical situation, how can China define

its modernity in relation to the Western others? If we consider modernity to be the self's sense of the present, does China have to gain that sense by comparing itself to the West?

The Chinese party-state's solution to the dilemma is to emphasize modernization as a process, rather than to focus on modernity as a sort of fixed condition, and to do so, the Communist Party and the state constantly refer back to the progress that China has made. The paramount example of such a practice is the state's "three-step" blueprints to realize modernization,⁴³ with each step referring back to the previous step, using such phrases as "doubling the GDP" of the previous period. According to this blueprint, the Chinese "modernity" locates in the future, but is built on previous and current modernizing efforts. Like the narratives of the evolution of Chinese clothing, the discourse of modernization constructs the past, present, and future as a continuous progress. Hence, the discourse of modernization provides a particular logic of time, in the same fashion that the official Chinese historiography orders time. In this logic, modernity becomes a trope, or to borrow Rofel's phrase (and Geertz's), a story that Chinese people tell themselves about themselves. The moral of this story is two-fold: On the one hand, if we desire the future, the better, and the modern, then we have to work hard towards it; and on the other hand, we should be encouraged by the fact that we have achieved a lot when compared to our situations in the past. Therefore, Chinese modernity is a story that Chinese people tell themselves about themselves in relation to their own past, rather than in relation to others.

⁴³ The "three steps" plan has been modified repeatedly by each party congress; however, overall consistence with respect to progress has been maintained in those various versions.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the dramatic changes of clothing styles in contemporary China. These changes did not take place in the form of fashion cycles as Kroeber predicted; instead, they appeared to be in a linear progression, shifting along with the changes in the broad social and political environments. The linear correlation between clothing styles and politics through time paves the ground for official representations of the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing styles as a story of progress and modernization. Consequently, the official narratives of the evolution of Chinese clothing create a structure of time, much in the same way as the broad discourse of modernization and the official historiography of contemporary China do. In this structure of time, the past, the present, and the future are not in breaks or ruptures, but are related to each other and all serve the purpose of progress. In this sense, the changes of clothing styles are rendered meaningful as an objectification and ordering of time, and yield insights about a uniquely Chinese notion of modernity.

Countering previous studies of modernity, which either locate modernity in the West and portray the “rest” as “people without history” (Wolf 1982) or people stuck in time (Fabian 1983), or assert an insurmountable distance between the West and the rest and thus the West is always ahead and the divide perpetuates (Rofel 1999), I argue that the Chinese modernity is a story people tell themselves about themselves in relation to their own past, rather than the Western other. This by no means suggests that the Chinese are oblivious of the influence of the West; in fact, Chinese designers and dress historians are very conscious of the West as they openly acknowledge influences of Western design techniques and clothing styles. What this Chinese notion of modernity indicates is that such Western influences only become meaningful when they become “Chinese,” especially in relation to China’s past. In this way, “local” meanings are

mapped onto clothing styles, and hence changes in China's clothing industry are not just economic developments as outlined in Chapter 2, but also involve social and cultural meanings that require cultural interpretation.

This chapter argues that one key meaning that the Chinese have mapped onto clothing styles in contemporary China is a Chinese notion of modernity. In the Chinese notion of modernity, history is "one of the most important signs" (Dirks 1990). The history of modern China as well as the history of contemporary Chinese clothing is simultaneously the rise of the Chinese nation-state. As illustrated by the official narratives of the evolution of contemporary Chinese clothing, the Chinese state is the single most important agent in fashioning the historiography of modern China. Therefore, this Chinese notion of modernity is intrinsically linked to the state.

To attest to the power of the notion of Chinese modernity as related to and in harmony with history and tradition, the "*tangzhuang*" was very popular in China in 2001 and 2002 and the name became a household term, despite the fact that it was openly criticized by Chinese scholars as "fake antiques."

4.0 FOR THE SAKE OF ART OR FOR THE MARKET? THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF FASHION DESIGN

Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art. – Andy Warhol

4.1 INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 2005, world renowned artist Mr. Chen Yifei passed away at the age of 59 in Shanghai. Following his untimely death, heated debates surged between his critics and admirers with regard to his contribution to Chinese art. Comments about Chen, which were often charged with emotions, quickly flooded China's newspapers and websites. Admirers acknowledged Chen as one of China's greatest artists, whereas critics believed that he had "sold out" to commercial interests and was not at all a first rate artist. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chen was one of the most sought-after modern Chinese artists; thirty three of his paintings were reportedly sold internationally at a total price of over 40 million *yuan* (about \$4.8 million) between 1991 and 1998. It is also a fact that Mr. Chen was the founder and owner of Yifei Group, through which he applied his aesthetic vision to businesses in fashion, modeling, publishing, environmental arts and design, and film making, which he called collectively the "pan-vision industry" (*dashijue chanye*). The debate surrounding Mr. Chen suggests that while for many Chinese the mixing of

art and commercial interests is a contested terrain that should be avoided, for others, like Mr. Chen, the logic of art and economy are intrinsic to a cultural industry.

As I argued in Chapter 3, social and cultural meanings are mapped onto clothing styles in China. Many fashion designers I interviewed see fashion as a cultural industry, in the sense that they think of fashion as not just a business, but a business that involves culture. Hence, they are largely in agreement with Mr. Chen that the fashion business involves both economic and cultural (specifically here artistic) logics.

The critics of Mr. Chen can find support in Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and argue that art and economy are two separate and autonomous fields that are structured by fundamentally opposite principles or "laws." The field of art functions, according to Bourdieu (1993), as "the economic world reversed," in the sense that its internal logic is the "refusal" or "disavowal" of commercial interests. From this perspective, by pursuing an interest in business, Mr. Chen lost his "disinterestedness" and "violated" the logic of the field of art, and hence compromised the purity of his art.

The intention of this chapter is not to examine the degree of Mr. Chen's "disinterestedness" toward his art; instead I focus on his particular interest in combining the logic of art and economy in the other "field" in which he was actively involved, namely, the fashion industry. I attempt to address the question of why Mr. Chen and other Chinese fashion designers try to combine in their work the logic of art and economy that appear to be opposite and irreconcilable. In what follows, I will examine the views and approaches of Chinese fashion designers toward their work, particularly through the cases of two prominent fashion designers and their businesses. I seek to understand the rationale behind the choices and strategies of Chinese fashion designers to cross the perceived "boundary" of the field of fashion as well as the

implications of their acts of combining the logic of art and economy both for the field of the Chinese fashion industry and the global fashion industry. In so doing, I attempt to provide an understanding of what it means to be a fashion designer in China. Given the initial conceptualization of the Chinese fashion industry as a field, some explanation of the field is in order.

4.2 FASHION AS A FIELD

Bourdieu (1993) uses the concept of “field” mainly to study literature and art, which he broadly calls the field of cultural production. According to Randal Johnson, the editor of Bourdieu’s volume, a “field” is defined as “a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except, obviously, in the case of the economic and political fields” (Johnson 1993: 6). By structure of the field, Bourdieu refers to the hierarchical distribution of positions that the agents or players of the field occupy (hence the structure of the field positions) and the different sets of strategies employed by the agents to improve their standing in the field (or the structure of position-takings). To define literature and art as a field, or more specifically as a field of positions and position-takings, Bourdieu intends to escape the dilemma of what he calls “the internal reading” and “the external analysis” of a literary or artistic work (Bourdieu 1993: 34). The former seeks explanations of the work in itself or within the system of works to which it belongs, thus it isolates the work from the social and historical context in which it is produced. To Bourdieu, this approach is ahistorical and asocial. On the other hand, the latter focuses on “the social conditions of the production of the producers [here writers or artists] and consumers [readers or patrons],” and

explains the act of the producers and their work as meeting the demand of the consumers and patrons, who are generally the dominant class or its factions (Ibid). According to the external analysis, the work is somehow taken as a reflection of the worldview of the social group at which the producer targets and of which he or she tends to be a member. To Bourdieu, the external approach is reductive. With a field analysis, the limitations of both approaches are avoided, because Bourdieu thinks a (literary or artistic) work is a work not only because of its position or the position of the producer in the field (e.g., a novel is a novel because it is written by a novelist), but also because of the inherent position-taking by the producer in competition with other producers. Differently put, a work, and by extension, the field, is also defined by and objectified through the struggle between the different positions and position-takings in the field, specifically between those of the orthodox and the heresy, the established figure and the newcomer, or the elite and the popular.

To conceptualize the fashion industry as a field and to understand its internal workings, we have to first identify the different positions of the agents or players in the field as well as their different approaches to their position-takings. Since the question on hand only has to do with Chinese fashion designers, other players in the field such as models and the media are not discussed in this chapter; instead they will be examined in the next chapter. In this chapter, I only focus on the positions and position-takings of the Chinese fashion designers, which are directly connected to their objectives in their work.

Artistic originality and commercial success are both desirable objectives of a fashion designer. Even though closely related, the two objectives are distinct from each other; success in one does not necessarily translate into success in the other. In fact, as Bourdieu puts it, the two objectives work in opposite directions—pursuing artistic originality entails exclusivity and

“restricted production,” while pursuing profit maximization involves “large-scale production” (1993: 53). According to Bourdieu, “restricted production” and “large-scale production” are two distinctive modes of production that constitute two sub-fields of cultural production. As Randal Johnson puts it,

The field of restricted production concerns what we normally think of as ‘high’ art, for example ‘classical’ music, the plastic arts, so-called ‘serious’ literature. In this sub-field, the stakes of competition between agents are largely symbolic, involving prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity...The field of large-scale production involves what we sometimes refer to as ‘mass’ or ‘popular’ culture: private owned television, most cinematic productions, radio, mass-produced literature. Sustained by a large and complex culture industry, its dominant principle of hierarchization involves economic capital or ‘the bottom line’ (1993: 15-16).

Differently put, the distinction between the two objectives of artistic originality and commercial success parallels two inherent and divergent processes pertaining to art and commodity, which Igor Kopytoff describes as “singularization” and “commoditization” (1986). While the process of “singularization” works to preserve the uniqueness of art items and resist market exchange, the “commoditization” process pushes objects into the market for exchange (*ibid*). Therefore, designing for the sake of art (*yishu*) or for the market (*shichang*) is a choice a fashion designer has to make. Between the two ends of art and the market, three different approaches have been theorized, which result in three business models, or as some scholars put it, three “fashion systems,” including “*haute couture*,” “*prêt-à-porter*,” and “fast fashion” (Reinach 2005). Designers of “*haute couture*,” or high fashion, or in Chinese, *gaoji shizhuang*, emphasize

originality, exclusivity, and luxury. They want the clothes they design to be treated as art and themselves artists. On almost the opposite end, designers of “fast fashion,” or low-end mass-produced ready-to-wear clothing, do not care much about the artistic value of their designs, instead they are most concerned about the cost and speed of turnover that would directly impact their financial results. Designers in this group are frequently accused by others as “imitators” or “counterfeiters” who simply copy very quickly whatever sells well on the market (Reinach 2005). Between *haute couture* and fast fashion, there is “*prêt-à-porter*,” or in Chinese, *gaoji chengyi*, meaning high quality ready-to-wear clothing, which claims to embrace both originality and marketability.

The three types of fashions of *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter*, and fast fashion are hierarchically ordered according to their level of originality (as well as price). While *haute couture* and *prêt-à-porter* are generally regarded as creative, original, upscale, and expensive, “fast fashions” are frequently looked down upon as unoriginal, low quality, cheap, and unethical replications or knockoffs of the former two. Hence, the three types of fashions constitute the “structured positions” in the field of fashion. Moreover, in the globalized world of fashion today, the structure of fashion often extends beyond the confines of nation-states. In other words, the structure of the fashion field is not limited to the fashion industry of a particular country, but it is also global. As stereotypes have it, Paris is the capital of *haute couture* in the world, and Italy is identified with its high quality *prêt-à-porter*, and in this order, “China, by definition, is fast fashion,” even while no proper term for the concept of “fast fashion” exists in Chinese (Reinach 2005: 11).

The stereotypical characterization of China as a fast fashion system essentially caricatures a China that is flooded by a sea of unoriginal, cheap knockoffs and counterfeits of

Western fashions. By extension, Chinese fashion designers are assumed to be “copycats” of their Western colleagues. According to this essentialist view, the Chinese field of fashion is filled with only one type of “position,” and Chinese designers’ strategies in their “position-takings” always favor marketability over artistic originality. However, my research on Chinese fashion designers and fashion companies finds that such a simplistic and essentialist characterization does not do justice to Chinese fashion designers and the Chinese fashion systems. On the contrary, my field research indicates that the reality is much more complicated for Chinese fashion designers, who are much more sophisticated in their approaches to fashion design than being mere “copycats.” As a group, they hold diverse views and methods rather than a uniform approach to their work and business, to which I now turn.

4.3 DIVERSE VIEWS AMONG CHINESE FASHION DESIGNERS

During my field research, I had the opportunity to interview about eighty Chinese fashion designers, and over twenty of them more than once.⁴⁴ Among them, many are seasoned designers, some have even attained the status of “celebrity designers,” but more than half of them are junior designers who have just started their careers or have only a few years of experience in the trade. Prior to each scheduled interview, I would design an interview guide, which included some general questions I had for all designers and some specific questions that I came up with after doing some preliminary research about the designer to be interviewed through newspapers, the internet, other publications, and/or other designers or friends. One of the

⁴⁴ I met and talked to a greater number of designers in different venues (including fashion shows and trade fairs), but I consider an interview here in a more formal sense that it is scheduled ahead of time either by me or through a friend of mine, and that I have designed an interview guide prior to the interview.

general questions I asked was how they dealt with the problem of designing for the sake of art or for the market. Surprisingly, they expressed conflicting views in their answers. It was particularly interesting to me that Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan (pseudonyms), who are among China's most prominent designers, had rather contradictory views.

To answer my question, Ms. Ye said, “art leads design, and design in turn leads life” (*yishu yingdao sheji, sheji yingdao shenghuo*). Ms. Ye further explained to me that fashion design should be the artistic expression of the designer's originality, taste, and unique style, and that without art there would be no identity, no life, and no future to a fashion design. Clearly, Ms. Ye thought that fashion design should be for the sake of art. Contrary to Ms. Ye's view, Mr. Yuan thought that “a designer should only dream others' dreams rather than his or her own” (*shejishi yigai fa bieren de meng, er bushi ziji de meng*). He considered designers' originality only secondary to serving the interest of their bosses and consumers. When pressed as to why the designers should not dream their own dreams, Mr. Yuan said that if the designer cared only about his or her individuality and creativity, he or she would lose sight of the market and subsequently his or her design would not be accepted by the market. Evidently, Mr. Yuan believed that fashion design should be for the sake of the market, which directly opposes Ms. Ye's view.

Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's firm but opposing views were especially interesting, not only because they were different from many younger designers I interviewed who took the middle road and claimed that both originality and marketability were important to their designs (though there were also supporters of either Ms. Ye's or Mr. Yuan's views), but also because their divergent views suggest multiple “positions” and “position-takings” in the field of Chinese fashion, which contradict the stereotypical view of Chinese designers as unoriginal “copycats”

and Chinese fashion as a fast fashion system. By highlighting Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's views here, I do not suggest that their views are more or less representative of all Chinese fashion designers—I would need a random and representative sample to make that type of claim. However, the prominence and influence of both designers does add extra weight to their views and approaches. To put their prominence in context, I have to briefly outline the history in which fashion designers emerged as prestigious professionals in China.

4.4 THE EMERGENCE OF FASHION DESIGN AS A PRESTIGIOUS PROFESSION IN CHINA

As described in Chapters 2 and 3, China's textile industry did not develop to the extent that it could provide the necessary input to support a fast changing fashion industry from the late Qing to the radical socialist period of the PRC (1949-1976). The political and moral environment during those periods (with the exception of the turbulent Republican era) also prohibited people from dressing freely. It was not until the post-1978 reform period when China's fashion industry began to develop. During this period, a few factors have set the stage for the development of the fashion industry. First, the state-initiated economic reforms encouraged market fragmentation and competition, which called for the creativity of fashion designers. Second, the Communist Party leaders encouraged the diversification of styles and redefined the ideological dimension of clothing to serve the interest of the country's economic developments. And finally, the economic reforms opened China up to influences of international fashions and fashion industries. All these factors have been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In what follows, I will only outline

the milestones in the processes of institutionalization of the profession of fashion design in China.

In 1980, Central Institute of Arts and Crafts (CIAC has since 1999 merged with Qinghua University) started the very first college program in fashion design in China. In 1984 both CIAC in Beijing and Donghua University in Shanghai established departments of fashion design. Since then, the numbers of college and university programs in fashion have increased dramatically. According to Professor Jia Jingsheng, there was an incomplete estimate of 720 colleges and universities, not including private professional schools, that offer training in fashion design (*China Fashion Weekly* 09/19/2003). The development in education and training in fashion design has produced a large number of professionally trained fashion designers by the 1990s. In 1993, China Fashion Association (CFA) was founded in Beijing, as a branch organization of China National Textile Industry Council, with an initial membership of only 64 people, among whom less than 10 were actual fashion designers and the rest were officials and college professors. In 1997, CFA started to organize the first China Fashion Week, the most important annual fashion event in China, during which the “China Top Ten Fashion Designers Award” (*shijia shejishi*) and the most prestigious “Golden Top” award (*jinding jiang*) are awarded to accomplished designers. In 2002, CFA had a selected member of over eleven hundred designers (CFA’s official website). By then, the profession of fashion design has been firmly established and institutionalized.

Although so far I have only described the structural forces that gave rise to Chinese fashion designers and the broad processes in which the profession became institutionalized, I have to add that the efforts of individual fashion designers have also contributed enormously to

defining both their own identities and the identity of their profession. Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan are cases in point.

As college graduates of fashion design in the mid 1980s, Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan belong to China's first generation of professionally trained fashion designers. As such, their accomplishments as successful designers also shape the development of the profession of fashion design in China. One particular event in Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's career not only made them well-known fashion designers, but also elevated the status of their profession in general.

In 1996, one of China's largest fashion corporations advertised in national newspapers to hire fashion designers with an annual salary of one million *yuan* (about US\$121,000 at the time). Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan were among the few candidates considered for the positions. To put it in perspective, the one million *yuan* job ad came out at a time when most Chinese people were making about ten thousand *yuan* or less a year. Not surprisingly, everything associated with the news caught a tremendous amount of public imagination as well as scrutiny. I was a junior in college at that time, and I first heard of the news from a radio talk show in Wuhan that solicited debates among the audience as to whether a fashion designer could be worth one million *yuan*. Although I do not remember the exact arguments of both sides, I vividly remember that the "side against" used the familiar and somewhat demeaning term of "*caifeng*" (tailor) to label the candidates, by contrast the "side in favor" used the new term of "*shizhuang shejishi*" (fashion designer). The different terminologies turn out to be rather significant to an understanding of the rise of Chinese fashion designers.

Although the terms of "*caifeng*" and "*shizhuang shejishi*" both refer to specialists in garment making, "*caifeng*" is the familiar term prior to the industrialization of China's garment industry, and it specifically refers to craftsmen (*gongjiang*) who learn their skills of making

clothes through apprenticeship with a master, and they make clothes on a small scale. Furthermore, the *caifeng* were officially ranked below the intellectuals (*shi*) and the farmers (*nong*) in the traditional Chinese status hierarchy. On the other hand, *shizhuang shejishi* or fashion designers only emerged since the economic reforms, and generally received their training in college or post-secondary professional schools. Consequently, Chinese fashion designers' status is aligned with the intellectuals by the merit of their education even within the frame of traditional status hierarchy. Another major distinction between the two is that innovation is not required of the *caifeng* (the quality was perhaps not even appreciated by previous social customs or ideologies that in general valued convention), while fashion designers are expected to be able to come up with innovative designs. As garments were increasingly manufactured in factories after the 1980s, the *caifeng* or tailors were gradually replaced by garment workers and fashion designers, maintaining only a marginal presence in China today. However, “*shizhuang shejishi*” was still a new term as well as a new profession when the one-million-*yuan* hire took place in 1996. For many people, myself included, it was the first time that “*shizhuang shejishi*” registered in their mind (and mine) as a prestigious profession, and one that could demand big money. In the midst of all the media hype, Mr. Yuan and another designer took the jobs, while Ms. Ye declined the offer.

The media sensation of “million-*yuan* designers” not only brought the profession of fashion design to the public consciousness,⁴⁵ it also caught the attention of the media. Increasing media coverage has since been devoted to fashion events, such as fashion shows, fashion fairs, and design and/or modeling competitions, subsequently contributing to the elevation of the status

⁴⁵ After the success of this corporation, several Chinese fashion companies followed suit and launched their own publically advertised hire of “million- *yuan* designers.”

of fashion designers. In fact, nationally famous designers are not only regarded as artists, but also celebrities, thanks in part to frequent media coverage. That said, only a handful of Chinese designers can be called “celebrity designers,” and most others generally have a much more difficult time working their way up. Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan are among the lucky few who have attained the status of “celebrated Chinese fashion designers” over the years. Such an attainment is not just due to their involvement in the media sensation of the “one-million- *yuan* hire” in 1996, but also because of their education, long experience of working as designer or chief designer in several fashion companies, high profile visits to Paris and other world fashion centers, influential fashion shows, and above all the numerous titles and prestigious awards they have won. To top it off, Ms. Ye won the “Golden Top Award” (*jinding jiang*) in 2001, the highest honor awarded by the China Fashion Association, and both Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan won CFA’s “Top Ten Fashion Designers Award” (*shijia shijishi*) in 1995, the first time such awards appeared in China. Currently, Ms. Ye is a professor at a fashion design institute, the owner of a design studio located in Beijing, and she also serves as Vice President of the CFA. Mr. Yuan is Chairman and Artistic Director of a fashion company based in Shanghai, and a member of the Fashion Art Committee at the CFA. In addition, he is also Guest Professor at several academic institutions.

The successes of Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan are not simply personal accomplishments, they are also models for younger designers and designers-to-be to emulate. To borrow Bourdieu’s terms, their paths to success are the “trajectories” through which they establish their “positions” within the field of fashion. Given the emergent nature of the fashion field in China, their “strategies” and approaches to their position-takings are particularly meaningful by providing

prominent examples and references. It is in this sense that their views are more than personal views, and their business models are more than individual cases, as discussed below.

4.5 MS. YE AND MR. YUAN

I met Ms. Ye in a hotel lobby when she was on a business trip to Shanghai. I made the appointment for an interview with her days earlier, and we decided the best time was in the afternoon when she would have some time between her other meetings, during which we could meet and talk in her hotel lobby over coffee. When the day came, I called her cell phone in the morning and confirmed the time and place of our meeting. Given our two previous failed attempts to meet on other occasions and in other cities, I considered this arrangement a perfect success, so I arrived before the scheduled time of our interview at the Galaxy Hotel where she stayed. Although I had not met Ms. Ye before, I recognized her immediately when two middle-aged women walked toward the open coffee bar in the hotel lobby. Compared to her image on various websites, she dressed more on the conservative side. She was in black: black shoes, black pants, a basic black shirt, and on top of it a black light cashmere cardigan. Her assistant came along in case she was late for her next appointment. We sat down at a table, ordered some drinks, and our interview started right away.

Ms. Ye spoke about the Chinese fashion industry and fashion designers with enthusiasm. She was proud of the boom China is witnessing (see Chapter 2), she was also proud that Chinese fashion designers are catching up so quickly with Western designers, and she was optimistic about the future of China's fashion industry. After seeing and indeed being a part of such tremendous growth of the industry in the past two decades, she had good reasons to be proud and

optimistic. Yet, her pride was also tinged with nationalist sentiments, and her optimism was mixed with a sense of responsibility as a prominent fashion designer. In her brief narration of the development of China's fashion industry, she conveyed a very clear message: We Chinese did it with regard to garment manufacturing, and we Chinese fashion designers can also make it with our Chinese fashion designs in the world of fashions. Curious about what she meant by "Chinese fashion designs," I asked her how she interpreted the "Chinese-ness" in her own designs. She said that she heavily utilized Chinese materials (such as silk), motifs (ethnic patterns and prints), and artistic genres in her designs. She used three terms to describe the characteristics of Chinese artistic genre, of which she saw her own design as a part, "*piaoyi*" (flowing and graceful), "*jianjie*" (of simplicity), and "*hanxu*" (modest or reticent). Those three terms generally pertain to the Chinese sense of beauty and are frequently used to describe traditional Chinese paintings or art forms.

After over an hour long interview—way over her initial estimate of half an hour, and ignoring her assistant's reminders of her next meeting—I came to understand why Ms. Ye said "art leads design, and design in turn leads life" in response to my question about her views on fashion design. She tied her design philosophy to the broad environment of the Chinese economy and the historical responsibilities of Chinese designers that she saw in the grand mission of the revival of the Chinese nation. Her argument boiled down to this: China has already become a powerhouse in garment manufacturing, which is an extraordinary achievement for the nation, and China will also become a world fashion leader, but in order to achieve this goal, Chinese fashion designers have to find their own identities, which is not possible without "art" (to her, the Chinese art), i.e., their own unique and innovative designs. Ms. Ye's view builds in part on an optimistic reading of the Chinese fashion industry and the overall Chinese

economy, a sentiment shared by many Chinese citizens who have benefited from China's recent economic boom, fashion designers included. However, there are also Chinese fashion designers whose views are much less optimistic, and Mr. Yuan is one of them.

My interview with Mr. Yuan was easier than the one with Ms. Ye in terms of scheduling. It turned out that Mr. Yuan's company was only half an hour away by taxi from the apartment I rented in Shanghai. I called him up one day and he agreed to my request for an interview in his office the next afternoon. Our interview was interrupted a few times and subsequently lasted several hours because Mr. Yuan had to meet with three groups of visitors. But while I was waiting, he showed me a book he wrote on fashion and his design portfolios, which included many creative designs and interesting ideas inspired by Peking opera that he was working on for a fashion show in the next season for a different company, and I also took the opportunity to see his showroom. Although the interview took place in his office, it was very relaxed, less structured, but friendly. He accepted my presence with ease while he welcomed his visitors. His office was very spacious, more like an artist's studio than an executive's office; all walls were fully decorated with paintings and Chinese calligraphy, brushes of different sizes took up much of the space on his huge desk. In one corner of the room, there was a reception area surrounded by comfortable sofas and chairs, where our interview and the reception of other visitors took place. Mr. Yuan's attire fitted very well with the friendly, laidback atmosphere of his office. He wore a velvet blazer over a low-rise turtleneck wool sweater, khaki pants, and leather shoes, all of which were in different shades of brown, nicely layered and subtly complementing each other. His attire and color scheme reminded me of pleasant outings to Shanghai suburbs in the warm sunshine of the early fall.

Despite the interruptions, Mr. Yuan had ample time to fully explicate his position that fashion designers can only “dream others’ dreams.” He viewed fashion as a business in which a designer had to put the consideration for the market ahead of his or her own aspirations for artistic expression. The importance of the market seems to be an evident point that many other Chinese designers have frequently related to me during my field research. Not totally satisfied with Mr. Yuan’s answer, I asked him what he thought of the Chinese fashion market and why he believed that it would clash with the designers’ own “dreams.” The Chinese fashion market, according to Mr. Yuan, has “Chinese characteristics,” a twist on a popular Chinese political slogan, “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Much like a politician, Mr. Yuan related to me that China was still a poor country with the bulk of the huge population living in the countryside, and that these “characteristics” meant that most Chinese could not keep up with the latest fashions. Mr. Yuan’s deterministic logic is not merely based on economic factors, however. He shared with me an anecdote: He was once asked at a press conference by a cynical Chinese fashion journalist why China still could not produce the world’s first rate designers. He simply retorted, “Once there are the world’s first rate Chinese fashion journalists, then there will be the world’s first rate Chinese fashion designers.” After finishing the story, he turned to me, as if continuing to respond to the journalist, “We [Chinese fashion designers and journalists] are in the same boat, and all of us are the products of our time and history.” Similar to his comments on the “Chinese characteristics,” the history Mr. Yuan talked about is not just economic history, but also political and cultural history. He mentioned that the “time” of his generation (people who came of age in the Maoist era) had influenced his and his peers’ conservative ways of dressing. He also compared Chinese fashion designers to “fish without water.” By “water” he

meant affluent consumers with good taste for fashion, without whom he believed that Chinese fashion designers would not be able to find the market for their unique and innovative designs.

Mr. Yuan's retort is more than an angry response to the fashion journalist. He truly believes that the growth of fashion designers is intricately linked to maturation of the fashion media, other supporting industries, and the consumers. His analogy between Chinese designers and "fish without water" also suggests that even if Chinese designers came up with original and innovative designs, Chinese consumers would not be able to either appreciate or afford them. More broadly, Mr. Yuan thinks that the legacies of China's past, the lack of an adequate consumer base, underdeveloped supporting industries such as high quality fabrics, dyeing and printing, and the immature fashion media have all hampered Chinese designers' ability to produce a world class fashion brand. In Mr. Yuan's opinion, it is in the "water" of the Chinese society that Chinese designers have to swim; they have to work with what they have and thus cater to the dreams of Chinese consumers rather than their own.

Evidently, Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan have rather different ideas toward fashion design. Ms. Ye believes that art should be the driving force of fashion design; whereas Mr. Yuan thinks that fashion design is restricted by the market and can only serve the interest of the market. Interestingly, their arguments are both grounded on the development of China's fashion industry in particular and the contemporary history of Chinese society in general. Although they appear to agree with each other on the basic facts about Chinese society and economy, they have different readings of these facts. Ms. Ye looks at the boom China is witnessing, and she is optimistic about the future of China's fashion industry, in which she believes there is an important role for Chinese fashion designers to play. On the other hand, Mr. Yuan's reading of China's recent past and present is quite pessimistic, and to some extent almost fatalistic.

Consequently he derives a market determinist view toward fashion design, even though he does not seem to separate his “personal” interest in art from his business, as evidenced by his creative work for other companies and by the dominant presence of paintings, calligraphy, and brushes in his office.

Given the keen insights of both Ms. Ye’s and Mr. Yuan’s and their long experience of working in China’s fashion industry, it is no surprise that their views are highly consistent with their current business models, which will be the focus of the following section.

4.6 THEIR BUSINESS MODELS

As already mentioned, Ms. Ye owns a design studio in Beijing, and Mr. Yuan owns a designer label company based in Shanghai. A design studio and a designer label company represent two different business models, in which the chief designers or artistic directors have different degrees of control over their designs. As a designer-owner of a studio, Ms. Ye has more control over her designs than a designer-owner of a designer label company, like Mr. Yuan, has over his. This is because Ms. Ye’s studio does not involve mass production and does not sell directly to the consumers. Instead, her clients are fashion manufacturers who lack design capacities, and with whom she works in a horizontal and cooperative manner. Just as her clients can choose and reject her designs, she can pick her clients directly or indirectly by choosing the particular types of clothes or fabrics to design in a particular season. For example, if she is interested in designing silk, she will target at the silk manufacturers; if she is interested in making dresses, she will look for dress-makers as her clients. Of course, there are times that orders come in first and require her to design particular types of clothing. But even those companies for whom she

designs entire seasonal collections have to respect and rely on her expert opinion, rather than dictate to her what her designs should be like. Furthermore, for the samples that are rejected by one client, she can always seek other clients who might be interested. The bottom line is that the relative low cost of producing samples does not negatively impact her financially in any significant way if some of the designs are rejected by any or all of her clients. Therefore, Ms. Ye has control over the designing process, independent of her clients, and consequently she can explore and produce very original and innovative designs.

Ms. Ye's studio was four years old when I interviewed her in 2004, and it had already expanded into six branch studios, with a staff of over 20 designers. Although her studio might not be well-known to regular consumers, she was clearly able to capitalize on her innovative designs, services, and her publicity and build the brand of her name-sake studio among the mass producers. I asked Ms. Ye whether she wanted to design her own line of clothing some day. She said that would be every designer's dream. However, she didn't think it would happen for her any time in the near future because she did not have the capital required for a designer label, and she did not want the support of external investors as that would compromise her control over the designs and also require a different set of management skills and marketing strategies from those utilized in her current business. All in all, Ms. Ye said that she was happy with the way her studio was running.

In contrast to Ms. Ye's studio, Mr. Yuan's company is a mass producer that sells directly to the consumers. Consequently, he has to closely follow the market's reactions to each of the styles his company designs and produces. If one style sells well, he will produce more of it; conversely, if one style does not sell, he will have to stop further production, offer discounts on those garments already on the market, or even pull them off the shelves. Facing the direct

financial impacts and rewards of the market, it is understandable that Mr. Yuan believes that a designer can only “dream others’ dream.” However, to prioritize the market does not entail a complete passive response to market demands. On the contrary, to maintain success in the market, one has to carefully study the market that one serves. In Mr. Yuan’s case, it is the Chinese marketplace that he attentively studies and from which he strategically seeks out a niche for his own line, and subsequently ensures its commercial success.

When I asked Mr. Yuan about his target consumers, he described them in this way: They are “men in my generation [in their 40s and 50s], who are rich enough to afford world class name-brand suits, such as Hugo Boss and Ermenegildo Zegna, but can’t afford or don’t want to buy their entire wardrobes from Hugo Boss or Zegna, and yet they are very picky about the quality of the clothes they buy.” This description is markedly different from the general terms such as “middle-class” or “white collar” that many other Chinese fashion companies frequently use to describe their target consumers. Mr. Yuan clearly identified a specific market segment in China: a group of affluent but not extremely wealthy, status and image-conscious male consumers who are looking for a combination of status markers, quality, comfort (both physical and psychological), and value. As Chinese society becomes more and more stratified in the reform era, status symbols such as clothing have gained tremendous significance in people’s social life, a trend of which Mr. Yuan is well aware.⁴⁶ He not only identified a niche market, but also set up a unique market strategy that further refined his target market and strengthened the

⁴⁶ Class is a touchy issue in China. During the Maoist era (1949-79), “class” was only interpreted as related to the means of production in a Marxist framework, such as “the haves” and “the have-nots.” The Communist revolution was supposed to have done away with the class of “the haves,” but the descendents of “the haves” were still labeled as “the exploiters” in the context of the ideological “class struggles” that were popular during the Maoist period. In the post-Mao reform period, the economic reforms brought about class distinctions in economic terms in China. Subsequently, there is an increasing interest in sociology and anthropology to study “social stratification” in China based on the income and prestige of various occupations (e.g., Bian 1996; Gao 2005; Li 2002; Zhang 2002), and social distinctions in people’s consumption patterns (e.g., Davis 2000; Goodman 1999).

competitive position of his product line. He decided not to directly compete with but to supplement world leading brands available in Shanghai, such as Hugo Boss and Zegna. To do so, he only included basic items, casual wear, and accessories, but not formal wear in his collection. In this way, he avoided what a new label could not offer, that is, a prestigious status symbol (as Zegna or Boss suits would); at the same time he offered something his customers would look for—quality auxiliary products at competitive prices. By aligning his products with leading world name brands, Mr. Yuan also avoids competition from most domestic brands that are deemed cheap by his target consumers.

As Mr. Yuan was describing his target consumers and marketing strategy, I had in mind a collection of basic items such as shirts, pants, ties, and belts, and casual wear including blazers, jackets, sweaters, and some sports gears, etc. I took a tour of his showroom while Mr. Yuan was receiving his last group of visitors of the day, and my expectations were largely confirmed. The clothes were well made, and the fabrics felt good, in terms of styles they were quite similar to the ones commonly produced by Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger, but the prices were much cheaper than Hugo Boss or even Ralph Lauren. I was most impressed by the logo of Mr. Yuan's line, which was neatly designed in both French and Chinese in a traditional font, very elegant and grand-looking. After an afternoon-long interview and a tour of Mr. Yuan's company, I was convinced that Mr. Yuan carefully studied his target consumers and strategically supplied what the consumers wanted but was not readily available in the Chinese market. There was little surprise that the company was already profitable even though it was just one year old.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Mr. Yuan told me about the profitability of his company during the interview, which was also confirmed to me by other designers who were close friends of Mr. Yuan.

Ms. Ye's studio and Mr. Yuan's designer label company represent two distinct business models, in which the designers (particularly the chief designer or artistic director) face different sets of choices and constraints, benefits and risks. On the one hand, Ms. Ye's studio does not involve mass production or serve the consumers directly, which allows her to maintain independent control over her designs. But the financial returns are much more limited than what mass production can potentially offer. On the other hand, Mr. Yuan's company involves mass production, and consequently it faces the direct impact and rewards of the market. Working with the model, Mr. Yuan felt that he was only able to design what the market wanted. That being said, he did not passively react to market demands; instead, he actively studied the Chinese market and sought out a market niche for his clothing line, which turned out to be great commercial payoff. From the vantage point of fashion design, it is clear that Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's business models correlate nicely with their divergent views: Ms. Ye value originality and she has the freedom to be creative and original in her studio; while Mr. Yuan outweighs the market over originality and he designs for the sake of the market in his designer label company.

As aforementioned, the divergent views of Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's contradict the essentialist stereotypes of Chinese fashion designers as mere copycats of their Western counterparts. But are they copying the international business models? At a first glance, the different views and approaches of Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan seem to parallel the differences between *haute couture* and fast fashion, which hinge on originality and marketability respectively. Therefore, it is important to compare and contrast Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's business models with the international fashion systems of *haute couture* and fast fashion.

4.7 THEIR BUSINESS MODELS IN CONTRAST TO *HAUTE COUTURE* AND FAST FASHION

Haute couture, the French term for high fashion, is a luxurious type of custom-made clothing utilizing the most expensive fabrics and sophisticated handworks. In terms of design, *haute couture* offers the most freedom for designers to pursue their creativity and originality. The uniqueness of each garment is guaranteed by its limited quantity, or in Bourdieu's term, "restricted production" (Bourdieu 1993: 53), and it is supposed to be identified with the particular artistic expression of the designer. Well-known *couture* designers (*couturiers* or *couturieres*) are frequently treated as artists, and their designs are sometimes collected by museums.⁴⁸ In the fashion world today, *haute couture* is frequently represented by about two scores of fashion houses located in Paris,⁴⁹ who are members of Fédération Française de la Couture, the guardian of the exclusivity of *couture*. Due to its luxurious and exclusive nature, the customer base for *haute couture* is very small, and the sales from the *couture* business are not enough to cover the cost of making the *couture* garments and the mandatory and expensive fashion shows twice a year (Dickerson 2003: 375-6; Frings 2005: 150-2). However, the *couture* fashion shows attract a tremendous amount of publicity worldwide, which earns great prestige and recognition for the fashion houses. As a business model, the *couture* houses have to cash in on their prestigious names/brands in order to remain financially afloat. Specifically, the *couture* houses rely on licensing and/or selling their name-sake ready-to-wear bridge lines (the *prêt-à-porter* lines) and accessories such as perfume and bags for profitability.

⁴⁸ For a brief history of *haute couture*, see Breward (2003), Dickerson (2003: 369-79).

⁴⁹ There are also about one dozen *haute couture* houses in Italy, but they are smaller and less influential as the Parisian *haute couture* houses.

Although Ms. Ye favors art over the market in her design philosophy as any *couture* designer would, her design studio is by no means a *couture* house. First of all, she does not design her own line of clothing. In fact, even if she chose to design a *couture* line, she would not have the supporting industries and skilled staff to support it (specialty fabrics, advanced dyeing and printing technology, and abundant skillful sewing staff are essential to the success of the *couture* houses in Paris), neither would she have a customer base large enough to sustain it. Second, her designs are truly “samples,” not for individual consumers, but the mass producers who lack design capabilities. Last but not the least, she does not seek inspiration (or “guidance”) from Western art; instead, her designs are rooted in the tradition of Chinese art.

Unlike *haute couture*, fast fashion emphasizes quick response, efficiency, mass production, and cost saving. It is a mass consumer-oriented business model, in which artistic originality and exclusivity are not likely to be maintained, given its goal is to mass produce or reproduce the popular styles in the shortest time possible. As a business model, fast fashion is in fact not a Chinese invention. The term was first used in 1990 by the Apparel Research Committee of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association in a task report, in which it is referred positively to a “quick response” system of product line development.⁵⁰ The then forward-looking report sees fast fashion as most adaptable to the future of fashion production. According to Reinach, the “finest fruit” of European culture is masterfully snatched by the Chinese and ripens in China (2005: 12), and ironically the forward-looking and positive business model now entails not just efficiency, but more importantly imitation, low quality, and

⁵⁰ The “1990 Task Report of the Apparel Research Committee of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association” is entitled “‘Fast Fashion’ – Quick Response Product Line Development.”

cheapness. In the meantime, there is no proper Chinese terminology for the concept of fast fashion.

From the outset, Mr. Yuan's company has a lot in common with the fast fashion model, as both focus on mass consumers, efficiency, cost, and profit. But, Mr. Yuan's line is not cheap, as fast fashion would imply. Although his line builds on leading world brands, he does not counterfeit or copy them. Instead, he consciously maintains an image of his own brand, which is reflected by, among other things, the meticulously designed logo in French and traditional Chinese writing. He also strategically differentiates his collection from those of his Western competitors. For example, he intentionally avoids suits in his collection. His commercial success is not derived simply from competing against his Western competitors with relatively cheaper garments, but more importantly from his in-depth knowledge of the Chinese consumers. After all, it is the Chinese consumers whom his brand is serving. His extensive knowledge of and experience in China's fashion industry allow him to identify a niche market that is composed of a particular group of Chinese consumers who seek status symbols as well as quality, comfort, and value. The identification of this niche market coupled with Mr. Yuan's ability to offer what the consumers are looking for at a competitive price ensures the success of his line. Because of all those factors, Mr. Yuan's company is not a fast fashion model, but a uniquely Chinese high-end designer label.

From the comparisons and contrasts above, it is clear that neither Ms. Ye nor Mr. Yuan imitate the international fashion models of *haute couture* and fast fashion. Their examples demonstrate that not all Chinese fashion designers are “copycats” and Chinese fashions are not a uniform fast fashion system. The disparity between the reality and the stereotypes of Chinese fashion designers reflects the instability of the field of the global fashion industry—on the one

hand, Western fashion centers try to hold onto their glory and prominence; and on the other hand, Chinese fashion designers attempt to find a name (or position) for themselves in the world of fashion. Differently put, the rise of the Chinese newcomers poses a threat to the existing structure of the field of global fashion. It is clear that there are implications for the global fashion industry in both Ms. Ye's enthusiasm for Chinese fashions and Mr. Yuan's competition with global brands for the Chinese market. But since their businesses are not globally oriented at the moment, it is far more important to understand the implications of Ms. Ye's and Mr. Yuan's views and approaches for the field of the Chinese fashion industry. In the following sections, I will analyze the implications by addressing two related questions: 1) What is a (Chinese) fashion designer? And 2) what is a fashion design?

4.8 WHAT IS A (CHINESE) FASHION DESIGNER?

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the role of a fashion designer parallels that of an author or writer, both involving attaching the name of an individual to his or her work. Therefore, insights about an author or writer help us understand what a fashion designer is. Building on the insights of Michel Foucault (1979) and Roland Barthes (1982), Clifford Geertz (1988) underscores the distinction between "authors" and "writers" (Barthes's terms), or "founders of discursivity" and "producers of particular texts" (Foucault's distinction). The former perform a function, the latter an activity; the former produce a "work," the latter a "text" (Geertz 1988: 18). By making this distinction, Geertz draws attention to the dimension of writing in ethnography and makes the point that great anthropologists (authors) are great in part because of the way in which they write. In the case of fashion designers, a parallel point can be made: They are fashion designers

because of the way in which work. In fact, that is also a part of the argument of Bourdieu's field theory, except that he uses the term of "position-taking." If we stop at this point, though a very important point, then we would miss a deeper commonality between an author and a fashion designer, that is, they both involve the issue of signature or authorship.

In an insightful study of Western history of aesthetics, Martha Woodmansee notes that, "[i]n contemporary usage an 'author' is an individual who is solely responsible—and thus exclusively deserving of credit—for the production of a unique, original work" (1994: 35). She argues that the notion of the "author" as the sole producer and owner of his or her intellectual work is a historical construct. It has to do with the emergence of the writers who sought to make a living off of their writings that were not protected by law in the eighteenth century Europe, which subsequently gave birth to copyright laws. Prior to those developments, an author, according to Woodmansee,

was first and foremost a craftsman; that is, he was [a] master of a body of rules, or techniques, preserved and handed down in rhetoric and poetics, for manipulating traditional materials in order to achieve the effects prescribed by the cultivated audience of the court to which he owed both his livelihood and social status (1994: 36).

Without looking into the complicated historical process in which the author as a craftsman was replaced by the author as a genius, I want to simply point out here that the profession of garment-making has undergone similar transformations in China in recent decades, and that Chinese fashion designers want to be treated as geniuses or artists (authors), but in the specter of the *caifeng*, which is after all how their trade was known in China for centuries.

As is previously discussed, one key distinction between a fashion designer (*shizhuang shejishi*) and a *caifeng* is creativity: while a fashion designer is always expected to be creative and original, a *caifeng* is only expected to follow conventions or instructions. Given the emergent nature of the field of the Chinese fashion industry, it is understandable that Chinese fashion designers, explicitly or implicitly, resort to art and originality, in order to keep themselves distinguished from the *caifeng*. Because of the specific context of the rise of profession of fashion design in China, Ms. Ye's emphasis on art is more than just a personal inclination or an individual approach to her business. It is perhaps also why Mr. Yuan seems quite ambivalent about the separation of art and his business, as he seems to enjoy the artistic aura of his office and creating original designs for fashion shows. Just as originality is intrinsic to the hierarchy of the three types of fashions of *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter*, and fast fashion, the logic of art and originality is also internal to the very status of Chinese fashion designers.

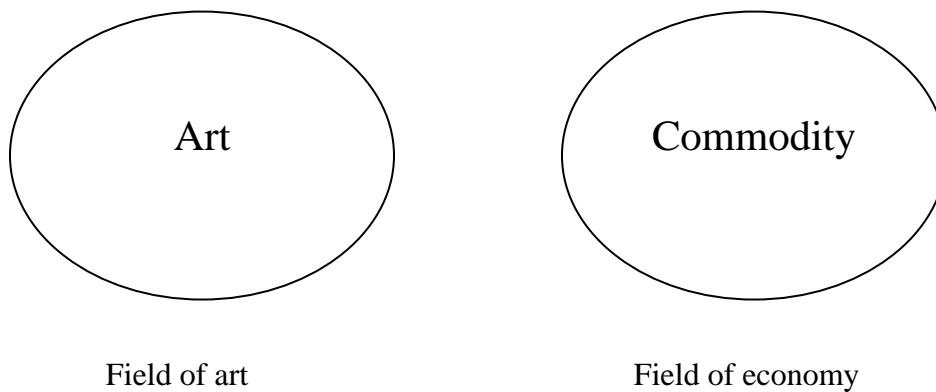
To return to the question raised in the beginning of this chapter, now we can see that there are good reasons for Chinese fashion designers to cross the perceived boundary between the fields of art and economy in the specific context of China's fashion industry. But is there a general condition in which fashion designers, Chinese included, tend to combine both the logic of art and economy in their work? To address this question, we have to look at the nature of fashion design.

4.9 WHAT IS A FASHION DESIGN?

As previously discussed, the controversy over Mr. Chen Yifei has to do with the conceptualization of the two fields of art and economy as completely separate and autonomous

spaces (per Bourdieu, see illustrations below). As such, we face the problem of having to locate fashion in either the field of art or economy, and subsequently treating a fashion design as either a piece of art or a commodity. This treatment, however, is not congruent with reality. On the one hand, a fashion design is evidently a commodity, aiming at pre-identified target consumers. On the other hand, artistic originality is also very important to a fashion design, so much so that it determines the quality of a fashion design, as seen in the hierarchical order of *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter*, and fast fashion. Therefore, a different conceptualization is needed in the case of fashion design.

Bourdieu's field theory:

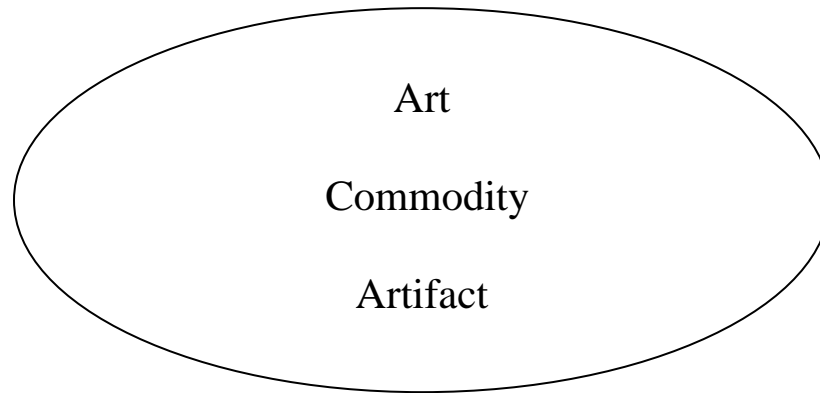


In an edited volume, Phillips and Steiner propose an alternative conceptualization of art, artifact, and commodity. They write:

[O]ne might say that the delicate membrane thought to encase and protect the category of 'art' from contamination with the vulgar 'commodity' has been eroded and dissolved from both sides. No longer treatable as distinct and separate categories, the art-artifact-commodity triad must now be merged into a single domain where the categories are seen to inform one another rather than to

compete in their claims for social primacy and cultural value (Phillips and Steiner 1999: 15-6).

Thus, here is Phillips and Steiner's conceptualization of art, commodity, and artifact:

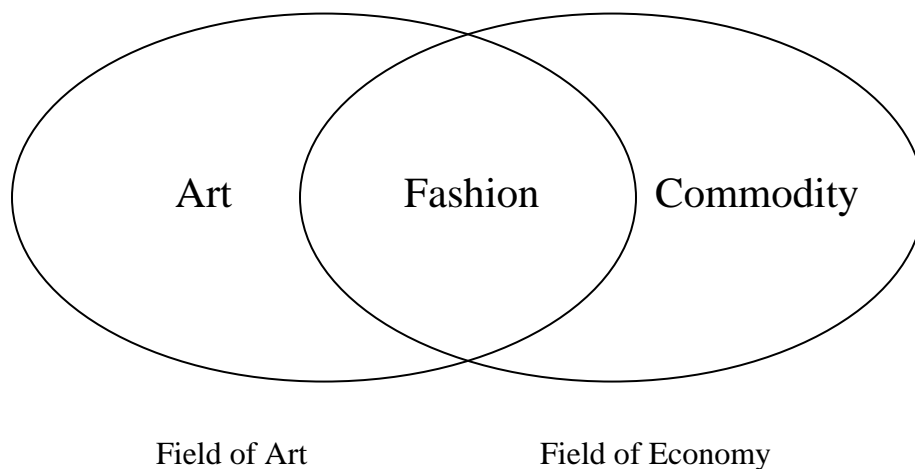


Phillips and Steiner's observation on the erosion of the distinctions or boundaries between art, artifact, and commodity (see illustration above) is particularly helpful to the analysis of fashion design, because fashion design clearly does not fit well in the rigidly defined conceptual space of either art or commodity. However, their conceptualization of art and commodity as a single domain or field hinders our understanding as well, because that would obscure meaningful distinctions between the two. Indeed, Bourdieu's conceptualization of art and economy as two separate and autonomous fields, where art and commodity are located, has the advantage of analyzing the different logics that operate in each field. In the field of art, it is a mode of restricted production, while in the field of economy large-scale production dominates. The two distinctive operating principles are also aptly put by Kopytoff as "singularization" and "commoditization" (1986). To ignore the distinctions between art and commodity risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As contradictory as it may seem, a compromise is possible between the two frameworks. If we do not insist that art and commodity belong to two separate and autonomous fields or one

single field, then it is possible to conceptualize them as belonging to the two fields of art and economy that intersect, and at their intersection lies fashion design (see illustration below). With this conceptual frame, we are able to not only resolve the problems of the dissolving boundaries between art and commodity noted by Phillips and Steiner, but also preserve their meaningful distinctions highlighted by Bourdieu and Kopytoff. Indeed, this conceptualization of fashion design as situated at the intersection of the fields of art and economy is most suited to analyze the seemingly conflicting objectives of fashion designers—they want to be artistic and original, and simultaneously they want to make money as well. Because their work belongs to the two fields of art and economy at the same time, fashion designers, Chinese included, can and often need to combine the artistic and economic logics in their work and business.

My proposition:



4.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the controversy over Mr. Chen Yifei's contribution to Chinese art, which raised the question why Mr. Chen and Chinese fashion designers cross the "boundary" between the fields of art and economy that have conflicting operating principles or logics. To answer the question, I applied Bourdieu's field analysis to fashion and identified three field positions: *haute couture*, *prêt-à-porter*, and fast fashion. The three types of positions, indeed three types of fashions and businesses, are hierarchically ordered primarily based on the level of originality. In this hierarchy, Chinese fashions are stereotypically characterized uniformly as fast fashions that are unoriginal, cheap, and low quality; and by extension, Chinese fashion designers are assumed as imitators of their Western colleagues.

I challenged the validity of the stereotypes of Chinese fashion and fashion designers by presenting the different views and approaches of two prominent fashion designers: Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan. Ms. Ye values artistic originality over the market. She utilizes heavily Chinese materials and motifs, and she tries to establish her identity by drawing inspirations from traditional Chinese art. Based on her view of fashion design, she chooses to set up a design studio where she can be innovative and original. Although she believes that art should be the driving force of fashion design like Western designers of *haute couture*, her design studio is not modeled after the Parisian *couture* houses. Her clients are primarily industrialized mass producers instead of wealthy individuals with vanguard tastes for fashion who patron *haute couture*. Different from Ms. Ye, Mr. Yuan chooses to design for the market. With his in-depth knowledge of his target consumers and strategic planning and marketing, Mr. Yuan carves out a niche market and successfully establishes his own brand. The success of his company is not a result of blindly imitating Western fashion or business model, but dependent on the fact that his

collection offers a unique set of value that the Chinese consumers are looking for. In sum, neither Ms. Ye nor Mr. Yuan are copycats of Western designers or business models. On the contrary, their diverse views and approaches contradict the stereotypes of Chinese fashion and fashion designers.

The examples of Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan not only call the stereotypes of Chinese fashion designers into question, they also partly explain why Chinese fashion designers need to resort to “art” or originality in order to find a name or position for themselves in the world of fashion. As new-comers to the global fashion industry, Chinese fashion designers face more challenges, among which are the stereotypes about them, and subsequently they need to be original so that they will not be so easily dismissed as copycats.

The fact that Chinese fashion designers like Ms. Ye and Mr. Yuan directly or indirectly resort to art also has to do with the particular context of Chinese fashion industry, which only came into being since the 1980s. As a newly established profession, Chinese fashion designers need to be original in one way or another in order to distinguish themselves from the *caifeng*, the lowly-esteemed craftsmen who are seen as lacking creativity but have been making clothes for centuries in China. It is particularly telling that even though Mr. Yuan prioritizes marketability over originality in his own business, his designs for fashion shows are highly original and artistic, a pattern shared by many Chinese fashion designers that will be further examined in the next chapter. In fact, one would be hard pressed to believe that he would be able to win all the prestigious awards that he did without being original and creative. Likewise, he would not be as successful as he is without winning those awards and titles. Through the explicit emphasis on (like Ms. Ye) or indirect resort to (as in Mr. Yuan’s case) artistic originality, Chinese fashion designers are able to forge a new identity of their profession in contrast to the *caifeng*. It is in

this sense that I claim that what it means to be a fashion designer in China has to do with the way in which they work. The meaning is related to the specific Chinese historical and socio-cultural context.

In addition to the specific context of the field of Chinese fashion, I also argue that the nature of fashion design, which is located at the intersection of the conceptual spaces of art and commodity, provides the opportunity for Chinese designers to combine the economic imperatives with the logic of art in their work and business. It is precisely because fashion crosscuts the fields of art and economy that a cultural-economic approach is required to understand the internal logic in the field of fashion. In this sense, Andy Warhol's notion of the art of business is not really far-fetched. In the next chapter, I will continue to take a cultural-economic approach to examine fashion shows during the China Fashion Week.

5.0 CHINA FASHION WEEK: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE CHINESE FIELD OF FASHION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As a field, China's fashion industry functions not just because of the work of fashion designers (as well as their supporting staff and workers who contribute to the production of fashion), but also the work of various other agents or players in the field, including models, journalists, buyers and consumers. To understand how those key agents or players work together to make the operation of the field of fashion possible, one has to figure out how they are related to each other, i.e., what their relative positions are in the field of fashion. Because China Fashion Week (CFW) is a regular national event that Chinese fashion designers, models, journalists, and fashion buyers as well as consumers congregate, it offers a perfect site to examine the relationship between those key players in the field and hence shed light on the ways in which the field of fashion works in China.

To study the workings of the field of fashion through fashion week is not entirely original. In a study of London Fashion Week (LFW), Joanne Entwistle and Agnes Rocamora (2006) argue that the event is a materialization of the field of fashion, in the sense that the boundaries and the hierarchical positions of the agents are rendered visible by the spatial and temporal arrangements at the LFW. They base their argument on a number of observations they

make at the LFW. To list a few: first, the controlled access to the fashion shows marks the boundary between those who are inside and those who are outside the fashion field. Second, within the “field,” that is, literally inside the venue of fashion shows, the seating arrangements (sitting vs. standing, and front rows vs. back rows) indicate one’s position (they use the term “fashion capital”) in relation to the rest of the field. And third, time is also hierarchical during the LFW; those who have more “fashion capital” tend to be “fashionably late” (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 742). Because of the correlations between the spatial-temporal structure at the LFW and the structure of the positions in the field of fashion, Entwistle and Rocamora argue that the LFW represents the microcosm of the British field of fashion. Moreover, they argue that by rendering the British field of fashion visible, the LFW reproduces the structure of the field.

Entwistle and Rocamora’s study of London Fashion Week provides a theoretical framework and a point of comparison for my study of China Fashion Week in this chapter. Following Entwistle and Rocamora, I argue that the CFW is an objectification of the Chinese field of fashion, and as such it reveals significant similarities and differences from the British field of fashion. Based on my field research on the CFW in November 2004, I provide an ethnographic account of the CFW, and compare and contrast the event with the LFW as described by Entwistle and Rocamora. I will seek to understand how the institution of fashion week developed and became localized in China, and how the institution of CFW as a microcosm of the field of fashion reflects and/or refracts the hegemonic power of the state that often permeates Chinese society. Since the main events at the CFW are catwalk fashion shows and the birth of China’s fashion industry is fairly recent, it is important to look at how fashion shows and fashion models have emerged in China.

5.2 FASHION SHOWS AND MODELING IN CHINA

According to Pan Kunrou (2003), a retired fashion commentator, the first Chinese fashion show was conducted in Shanghai in 1909, learning from an example in Philadelphia.⁵¹ However, the earliest occurrence of fashion shows in China was interrupted during the war times in the 1940s. Western historians also recorded events of fashion shows of sorts that were organized by the Chinese nationalists to promote national products (*guohuo*) during the 1920s and 1930s (Finnane 1996: 118; Gerth 2003: 203-4). The very first fashion show the Chinese witnessed after the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1949 was in 1979 when French *couturier* Pierre Cardin brought French models to China to showcase the garments he designed. Although Pierre Cardin's first fashion show was restricted to an audience of "the professionals" (*zhuanye renshi*) and cadres in the textile industry, it was so well received that he was authorized by the Chinese central government to do another show for the general audience at the Beijing Hotel in 1981. Pierre Cardin's fashion shows were an eye-opener for the Chinese because they not only displayed western fashions (particularly at a time when the *zhongshanzhuang* was still the predominant style as discussed in Chapter 3), but they also introduced the format of fashion shows and modeling. Aside from the excitement,⁵² the Chinese leaders perhaps also felt embarrassed that a country as large as China did not have any fashion models, as my one of my interlocutors suggested.

⁵¹ I interviewed Ms. Pan twice in Beijing in 2004, during which she generously provided me with the reference of her article (2003) and other useful information to my research.

⁵² Several Chinese designers recalled their experience of Pierre Cardin's early fashion shows as exciting and surprising, which was reflected by a common phrase they used, "[I never thought that] clothes could be made that way!"

In 1980, China's very first team of fashion models was formed in Shanghai, named "Shanghai Fashion Performance Team" (*Shanghai shizhuang biao'yan dui*), and the models were called "fashion actresses" (*shizhuang yanyuan*). According to Professor Liu Xiaogang at Donghua University, the early "fashion actresses" worked only part-time, and when they were not participating in fashion shows they returned to work in the garment factories (personal interview in 2004). One of the main missions of the team was to "foster cultural exchange," which meant to work with foreign designers when needed. Due to the limited scope of their activities, these "fashion actresses" were not at all in regular demand. Nevertheless, this team was an ice-breaker and certainly had its heydays. In 1983, they were "invited" to perform at *zhongnanhai*, the headquarters of the PRC central government (Pan 2003). In 1985, twelve of them were chosen by Pierre Cardin to work for his fashion shows in France, the first time for Chinese models to work overseas.

The success of the Shanghai team soon inspired many other cities including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Beijing, and Dalian to follow suit and set up their own "fashion performance teams." Like the Shanghai team, these teams were all part of the primarily "planned economy" or "command economy" (see Chapter 2). The internal organizations of the teams were not in the form of an agency, but a worker-cadre relationship (Bao 1999: 19). The work for the teams was generally assigned by the government. In addition, as indicated by their names, the early fashion models in the PRC were considered "actresses" and fashion shows were considered "performances," which suggested their closer kinship to other cultural performances like Peking Opera than a promotion of commercial interests. These names reflected partly the lack of references in the Chinese cultural repertoire and partly China's underdeveloped state of commerce at the time. As the textile and apparel industries moved into a market-driven

economy in the late 1980s, reforming the “fashion performance teams” became imminent. In 1992, China’s first modeling agency, Xinsilu, was formed in Beijing, in fact transformed from a “fashion performance team” that had been established a few years before. The new agency was based on a contractual model-agent relationship rather than the previous actress-cadre relationship (Pan 2003: 30). That is to say, the modeling industry in China started to shift from a command economy to a market-based economy in 1992. As noted in Chapter 4, the market reform in the fashion industry also led to the establishment of the China Fashion Association in 1993. In 2000, the first national organization of fashion models, China Professional Fashion Models Committee was formed within the CFA, which marked the formal institutionalization of the fashion modeling industry.

Today, fashion modeling has become a distinct profession in China, and fashion shows have become a major and popular means to promote fashion products, brands, trends, and designers, at fashion companies’ wholesale buyers’ fairs, in shopping malls, at trade fairs and exhibitions, and during city or national level fashion weeks. Each year, there are about 200 fashion related trade fairs, exhibitions, festivals, and fashion weeks nationwide (Ding 2003: 13).⁵³ In contrast to the early fashion shows in the PRC, fashion shows today are called “*shizhuang xiu*” rather than “*shizhuang biaoan*,” and the models are called “*mote*” instead of “*yanyuan*.” The new terms of “*xiu*” and “*mote*” are popular neologisms borrowed from the English terms of “show” and “model” respectively. The new terms reflect a desire of the Chinese modeling industry to learn from the West and to forge a new identity that is different from previous perceptions of fashion shows as “performances” and models as “actresses.” Besides the promotion of fashion, fashion shows are also frequently included in the programs of

⁵³ This estimate is supported by a fashion journalist’s own calculation, whom I interviewed in 2004.

all sorts of entertainment parties or concerts, ranging from college graduation parties (even at the departmental level),⁵⁴ to club parties, and to large scale city level celebrations. Modeling contests and beauty pageants have also become very popular since the late 1990s (Brownell 2001).⁵⁵ However, fashion shows during China Fashion Week are considered the most professional and widely reported fashion shows in China.

As a gala of fashion shows, China Fashion Week is one of the most important fashion events in China. Like the London Fashion Week and other major fashion weeks in the world, it is held twice a year (since 2003) in Beijing: one in the spring (in March or April) showing fall and winter fashions of the same year, and the other in the fall (in November or December) showing the following year's spring and summer fashions. Due to less variety of winter clothing and fewer participants in the spring event, the CFW in the spring is typically smaller in scale than the one in the fall. In addition, all the important awards are given only in the fall. Therefore, the CFW in November or December is much more sought-after by domestic and international media as well as by the general audience. The fall CFW I attended in 2004 is a case in point.⁵⁶ Before I get to my field observations of the 2004 CFW, the eighth CFW in China, it is important to understand how and why the institution of the CFW was established.

⁵⁴ I first witnessed this at my department's graduation party in Wuhan in 1994.

⁵⁵ Modeling contests and beauty pageants are very similar in format, and sometimes same candidates compete for both. In the Chinese popular imagination, the two are frequently grouped together as part of the "beauty economy." However, there are differences between them. Miss China Universe (2004), Wang Meng, pointed out to me during our interview that beauty pageants emphasize both inner and outer beauty and that beauty queens often have missions in charitable works. Models, by contrast, generally work through an agency that does not have a stated mission for charity.

⁵⁶ The 2004 CFW (fall) is generally called the "CFW 2005 Spring/Summer Collection" in the media.

5.3 THE HISTORY AND AGENDA OF THE CHINA FASHION WEEK

As discussed in previous chapters, China's fashion industry only began to develop after the state initiated economic reforms since 1978 when the Chinese economy shifted from a primarily "planned economy" to a market-based economy. In addition to the economic measures to boost the growth of the clothing industry (see Chapter 2), top government officials also tried to release the ideological baggage of clothing from the radical socialist era by making public speeches and wearing Western suits themselves since the mid-1980s (see Chapter 3). It is fair to say without the help of the state, China's fashion industry would not have flourished in the 1990s.

To better assist and regulate this new industry, the China Fashion Association (CFA) was formed as a branch organization of the China National Textile Industry Council (CNTIC) in 1993. Although the CFA was established as a voluntary organization, its parent organization CNTIC had close ties to the central government—its predecessor was the former Ministry of the Textile industry (see Chapter 2 for the evolution of the Chinese government bureaucracy pertaining to the textile and apparel industries). Mr. Du Yuzhou, Chairman of the Council who was also the former Minister of the Ministry of the Textile Industry, served as the first and second President of the CFA until the end of 1998. The CFA and CNTIC also inherited a large number of personnel and the office building from the former Textile Ministry of the central government, which is prominently located on Chang'an Street, only a few blocks away from the Tian'anmen Square.⁵⁷ In 1998, when Mr. Du Yuzhou resigned from his post as President of the

⁵⁷ According to a high ranking official of the Council who I interviewed in 2004, the Council and CFA then hired more personnel from the job markets on a contract basis than from the former Textile Ministry. Because of the personnel inherited from the former Textile Ministry, the Council also received funding from the central government to account for their salaries and benefits, including retirement benefits. However, the funding was not for the contract-based employees.

CFA, his resignation had to be approved by the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council (CFA official website), which further revealed the CFA's close connection to the state. With the CFA's close ties to the state, hosting the China Fashion Week reflects the desire of state desire to jumpstart China's fashion industry.

For the CFA, the goal of organizing China Fashion Week was to provide a stage for both domestic and international brands and fashion designers to “showcase new products and display characteristics of new designs” (CFA official website). But through the stage of the CFW, the CFA also had its own agenda, among which was to give awards to fashion companies, brands, designers, and other fashion professionals. These awards are part of the CFA's designed projects (*gongcheng*) to quickly build China's “named fashion designers” and “named brands,” dubbed by Mr. Du Yuzhou as “*mingshi gongcheng*” and “*mingpai gongcheng*” respectively (CFA internal documents). These awards become specific measures of the CFA to facilitate rapid growth of China's fashion industry.

In order to effectively execute the “*mingshi gongcheng*,” the CFA established an elaborate structure of awards for fashion designers at the CFW. The awards are hierarchically set up into three tiers, each with varying degrees of prestige. At the very top is the most prestigious Golden Top Award (*jinding jiang*), which is awarded once a year to one designer. In the middle is the “Top Ten Fashion Designers Award” (*shijia shejishi*), and at the bottom is the least prestigious but more numerous “New Designers Award” (*xinren jiang*).⁵⁸ While the first two are awarded to practicing designers, the third tier awards are for the designers-to-be, i.e., college students majoring in fashion design. According to the CFA rules, to be qualified for a

⁵⁸ In the third-tier awards, now there are more contests and awards equivalent to the “New Designers Award,” all of which are sponsored by and named after particular companies in the fashion industry.

higher level award, one has to win a one-tier less prestigious award (CFA internal documents). This award system actually took quite some time for the CFA to work it out.

When the first CFW was held in 1997, the first Golden Top Award was granted to Mr. Mark Cheung (also known as Zhang Zhaoda). According the CFA rules, he had to be a former winner of the “Top Ten Designers Award.” Indeed he was. This only became possible because two classes of “Top Ten Designers Award” and three classes of “New Designers Award” had already been awarded before the first CFW.⁵⁹ In other words, the first two classes of “Top Ten Fashion Designers” (and the first three classes of “New Designers Award”) were selected based on criteria other than the performance of the designers’ fashion shows. One early winner of the “Top Ten Fashion Designers award” confirmed to me that those early awardees were selected based on tests (including theoretical questions) and a few sample designs. Nowadays, however, the “Top Ten” are chosen mainly on the basis of their fashion shows. The rules for selecting the Golden Top Award have changed as well. The earlier Golden Top Awards were chosen internally by the CFA,⁶⁰ but since 2001 the Golden Top Award was decided by more transparent procedures. First a committee of judges, comprised of college professors, renowned fashion designers, foreign experts, fashion journalists, and executives from the retail sector (a recent addition), would nominate qualified candidates based on their fashion shows, and then the CFA members attending the annual CFA conference during the CFW would vote to determine the final winner (CFA internal documents). Because of all the necessary preparations, including

⁵⁹ The first class of “Top Ten Fashion Designers” and “New Designers Awards” were awarded in 1995 after the CFA was formed, and one class of “Top Ten” in 1997, but two classes of “New Designers Awards” in 1997. Two classes of “Top Ten” were awarded in 1998, but since then the three classes of awards are synchronized with the CFW.

⁶⁰ It almost became a scandal at the first CFW when the media ranked Ms. Wu Haiyan as the number one designer, but in the end the Golden Top Award was given to Mr. Zhang Zhaoda by the CFA.

forming various committees, training fashion journalists,⁶¹ and hosting design contests in order to cultivate both the experience and “credentials” of the fashion designers, it took the CFA four years to launch the first CFW in December 1997, with only nine fashion shows in that year. In 1998, more fashion designers participated in the CFW and all three types of awards began to be synchronized and awarded together at the CFW in the fall. Since then, the three tiers of awards have become institutionalized at the fall China Fashion Week.

In the following section, I will present my general observations of the CFW based on my field research at the CFW in the fall of 2004, followed by my field research on Mark Cheung’s show, the finale of the CFW in 2004.

5.4 CHINA FASHION WEEK, FALL 2004

The China Fashion Week 2004 was held between November 19th and 25th, at the China World Hotel and the Beijing Hotel,⁶² which have been the conventional sites for the CFW. Only one fashion designer, however, chose a third site for her show, a move interpreted by observers as aimed to capture more media attention. Like the LFW, all the events at the CFW were access-controlled—there were gates to all the events and gate-keepers who checked for tickets and in some instances for invitations in addition to tickets. The gate-keepers were generally the hotel security guards, but for the last show by Mark Cheung detailed below, the police served as the gate-keepers. The tickets were generally issued by the CFA, and the invitation by the host

⁶¹ Similar to the CFA, most fashion media were created in the 1990s. For instance, two major national fashion newspapers, China Fashion Weekly and Fashion Times were founded in 1994.

⁶² Journalists jokingly called the two sites “*Zhongguo da* [fandian]” (meaning “China big”) and “*Beijing da* [fandian]” (“Beijing big”).

designer. The tickets were not for sale, but were distributed ahead of time by both the CFA and the host designer. The CFA would send the tickets to its members, the registered media, and fashion institutions in Beijing (who would in turn distribute the tickets to their students). The CFA also reserved a number of un-ticketed seats for its own officials, officials of the Textile Industry Council, judges, and “distinguished guests” (*guibin*) including government officials, foreign guests, and corporate sponsors. For most of the fashion shows at the CFW, the ticket alone was sufficient to gain entry to the shows. In many cases, the host designer would also reserve some seats for his or her friends, buyers, or VIP customers by providing them with invitations along with the tickets. In general, the number of tickets issued would exceed the capacity of the show theater out of the desire for a full house but for fear that some people with tickets would not show up. As a result, in many popular shows, there were people standing in the back, although no standing tickets were issued for the CFW (unlike the LFW, which according to Entwistle and Rocamora [2006: 741] issues standing room only tickets).

Tickets and invitations allowed entry to the events, but once inside the show theater space, seating was another story. Although no specific seats were designated on the tickets, there were some seats that were reserved for special groups of people. There were seats on the three sides surrounding the T-stage. At the foot of the T were seats designated for the “distinguished guests,” as they were noted by the back of the chairs “*guibinxi*.” Those seats commanded the best view; they were placed right in front of the media cameras. The front-row seats on the other two sides were marked as “VIP” seats (sometimes they were simply reserved as such with or without special marks), and they enjoyed better and close view of the show. Those seats were generally reserved for the invited judges, fellow designers, friends, and the VIP customers of the

host designer. Seats in the back rows that enjoyed the worst view were undistinguished, and they were for the general ticketed audience.

As a foreign researcher, I was not a member in the Chinese field of fashion, thus I could not get tickets directly from the CFA. However, during the course of my research, I was able to establish connections with various members in the Chinese fashion field, including fashion journalists, designers, and fashion show producers. Through the help of my connections, I managed to attend twenty-five out of the total of thirty fashion shows, the opening ceremony, and the fashion forum, two design contests, and a few press conferences at the 2004 CFW. For most of the fashion shows, I was able to find someone who had an extra ticket or invitation, but there were a few instances when no tickets or invitations were available and I had to ask journalists or fashion designers to escort me through the guarded entrance. In one instance, the show producer, who was a good friend of a friend of mine, had to literally come out and escort me in through the backdoor as “his staff” because the show was held outside of the main sites and had fewer seats available, so much so that even members of the media could not get in without an invitation.⁶³

Because the demand for individual fashion shows varied, it was hard to gauge how many people or media actually attended each individual show (and no official statistics are available). But according to the CFA press release, there were a total of five hundred fashion editors and reporters (including some international ones) registered with the CFA. Foreign designers also participated in the fashion week; among the thirty shows, three were by Japanese designers, one color show by Kodak, one by a Korean designer, one by a group of eight young French designers, and one Italian men’s wear show. Although I have seen all the shows by foreign designers and

⁶³ Hundreds of people, including members of the media, could not get in to see the show.

brands, in this chapter I only focus on the show by Chinese designers. In particular, I will focus on my experience of the finale show by Mark Cheung, one of the most sought-after shows during the CFW.

5.5 THE FINALE OF CFW 2004: MARK CHEUNG'S *JIANGNAN*

Although the CFW has only a short history of eight years, it has become a tradition that Mr. Mark Cheung, the first Golden Top Award winner, would be the host of the final show at the CFW. According to journalists, Mr. Cheung wants to encourage younger designers to create new designs with his own example; the subtext is that even an accomplished designer like him works hard and churns out something new every year. The finale show from the master (*dashi*) was the hottest show of the CFW, which meant that tickets to the show were in high demand. Indeed, unlike many other shows, the tickets to Mr. Cheung's show were not distributed by the CFA, but by his team to ensure the exclusivity of the audience. But for my acquaintance with Mr. Cheung's personal assistant, I would not have been able to get an invitation letter and a ticket to the show.

The show was held in the Banquet Hall at the Beijing Hotel on the evening of November 24. I arrived at the Banquet Hall about thirty minutes in advance of the scheduled show time. Most of the seats, except the first three rows, were already taken. The theater was not that big compared to the other site of the CFW (the China World Hotel), housing probably about five to six hundred seats, which surrounded the T-stage on three sides. Facing the "T" was the media stage camped with tripods and cameras. In front of the media stage, there were a few rows of empty seats prominently reserved by the CFA for the "distinguished guests." The position of

those seats corresponds to what is called the “*zhuxitai*” (literally meaning the “chairman’s seat”) of most large events that involves government officials in China. From previous experience, I learned that the “distinguished guests” would generally include CFA officials, Textile Industry Council officials, corporate sponsors, distinguished foreign guests, and government officials (image 3 captures a corner of the media stage and some of the “prestigious guests”). The first few rows of seats on the two sides of the runway were the VIP seats. Experience from previous shows told me that those VIP seats were reserved for judges and people with invitation letters, including friends and VIP customers of the designer. Behind the VIP seats were seats for the general audience.

Feeling emboldened with an invitation in hand, I walked directly toward the front rows on one side of the runway. But before I got there, I was stopped by a policeman, not regular staff of the designers (who would generally receive guests with invitation letters and direct them to the VIP seats) or security guards of the hotel (who typically controlled the entrance) as in other shows. I showed him my invitation, but he did not even look at it, only told me in cold voice, “Those are not for you.” In puzzlement, I looked around for an empty seat further back and I located one in the fourth row on the opposite side. When I was about to make my way directly through the opening between the T-stage and the *zhuxitai* area, I was stopped once again by the policeman, who told me that I should take other “detours” but was too busy to explain to me where those “detours” were or why I could not use the pathway. In fact, I was familiar with the setting of the theater from watching previous fashion shows and knew there were no real “detours.” So, I had to elbow through the media stage, and on the way I found out from the journalists that the Mayor of Beijing was on his way to the show and that was why there was a

heavy presence of the police and why so many front seats were “reserved” (apparently the Mayor was not coming alone).

I finally sat down and took a good look at the setup of the stage. The backdrop of the T-stage was composed of three huge panels of watercolor painting, which stood out in the dimly lit theater hall. The painting looked like a typical small rural town in South China (*jiangnan*, or south of the Yangtze River), characterized by three iconic *jiangnan* objects: a little bridge (*xiaoqiao*), a small river (*liushui*), and rows of houses (*renjia*). The bluish watercolor and dim light dramatized the romantic aura of a smoky *jiangnan* town faded into the distance. For a brief moment, my thoughts meandered: perhaps the people living in the houses were cooking, or perhaps it was because of the drizzle. It looked all so familiar yet distant, as if coming out of a nearly faded memory. As someone who grew up in South China, I knew where this memory came from: not exactly from what I remembered of my hometown, but from a “collective memory” of the “*yanyu* (smoky and drizzling) *jiangnan*” passed down by generations of Chinese poets and artists. If the image of the rustic, romantic, and mystic *jiangnan* drew my thoughts away, then the stage extended from the backdrop took me back to the show theater. The runway carried the same motif as the painting; it looked like a little bridge, guarded by wood posts linked by ropes (see image 1 for the setup of the stage).

The setting reminded me that the name of the show, *Jiangnan* with a subtitle “Mark Cheung 2005 *Haute Couture* Fashion Show,” was on the invitation, and the Chinese characters of *jiangnan* were written on the envelop in beautiful calligraphy with signatures (one in Chinese and one in English) and seals of Mr. Cheung arranged in a traditional manner. The invitation was nicely designed. It was folded in three ways. On the front was the image of the tiles on the roof of a typical *jiangnan* house, and the edge of the front fold was cut off in the shape of the end

of the roof. On the second fold was a traditional style Chinese painting of a watery *jiangnan* scene. Inside the folds, from right to the left (as in the traditional Chinese way) were the name of the show and then a classic poem by a famous poet Xu Zhimo, beautifully illustrating the scenery of *jiangnan*. To the end of the poem, Mr. Cheung added, "...My only choice is to let the silk thread take me back to [my] dream of the *jiangnan*." Below the poem was an image of a traditional scholar sailing on a small boat, and further below was a picture of Mr. Cheung and his impressive resume written in both Chinese and English. Reading Mr. Cheung's invitation was a total aesthetic experience.

The room was quickly filled up, even in the seats for the "prestigious guests." Right in the center of the front row, I saw Mr. Du Yuzhou, Chairman of the National Textile and Apparel Industry Council, in front of him was a big long-lens camera supported by a tripod. In the rear of all three sides, people were standing up squeezing into whatever room they could find. I turned to the people next to me, and quickly found out that both were college students majoring in fashion design. But before I could have a longer chat with my neighbors, the music was turned up, smoke came out of the runway, and the show began.

The show lasted about thirty-five minutes, and a total of sixty to seventy ensembles were displayed, which were divided into two sets—day wear and evening wear (as most shows did). Ruffles and layering were two dominant features of the entire collection, perhaps inspired by rows of roof tiles on those *jiangnan* houses or perhaps the waves of the river (as one journalist pointed out in her report). The overall darker tones of blue, black, and burgundy of the entire collection were clearly taken from typical *jiangnan* scenes. The colors of the clothes and the painting in the background were strikingly harmonious. For the most part, clothes in the first set were wearable, cheery, and youthful, represented by blue bell bottoms, embellished with ruffles

(see image 2). The second set of the collection shifted dramatically to evening gowns, accompanied by the spectacular shifts of music from solo flutes to a dramatic ensemble of traditional Chinese instruments. If not for the consistency in colors, the ruffles, and the layering (as well as the traditional Chinese music), the two sets of clothes would have appeared to be two completely separate shows. The styles of the gowns were mostly European style ball gowns, and many of them were truly elegant and sophisticated, but too busy in details and layering to be contemporary. Indeed, quite a few gowns resembled the 18th century Rococo style. It was hard for me to picture an occasion for which those gowns could be worn in China other than on the runway.

5.6 THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF CHINA FASHION WEEK

I enjoyed Mark Cheung's show enormously, especially the rustic, romantic, and nostalgic aura of the clothes, the setting, and the music.⁶⁴ The entire show was magnificently done, and everything was coherently tied to the central theme of the *Jiangnan*. But for the heavy presence of the media and the frequent flashes of the cameras, I would have mistaken it for a theatrical performance. Indeed, the theatrical aspects of fashion shows have led scholars to ponder the connections between fashion shows and theater performances (e.g., Kondo 1997; Troy 2003). But, I am also acutely aware that fashion shows mean business: lots of money is spent on the

⁶⁴ Mark Cheung accepted my request of interview with him, but the interview never materialized before I had to leave China. His use of traditional Chinese art and the rural and nostalgic scene were perhaps due to his attempt to define the "Chineseness" of his designs, which was particularly important for a prominent designer like him who had opportunities to do fashion shows in many foreign countries representing China. Other prominent designers, like Ms. Ye discussed in Chapter 4, had similar experiences as well as inclinations to resort to traditional Chinese culture for inspirations.

production of shows and major players in the fashion industry are involved in the process; simply put, fashion shows are spectacular commercial promotions. Mark Cheung, as a seasoned designer who oversees five lines of clothing,⁶⁵ of course knows the economic interests at stake. However, none of the styles from his five brands were displayed during his show. The names of his five *prêt-à-porter* lines were not even on the huge backdrop painting. In fact, he calls his show an *haute couture* show (both on the backdrop and the invitation). The differences between the collection he showed at the CFW and his *prêt-à-porter* lines that he sells on the market are striking. As discussed in Chapter 4, *prêt-à-porter* and *haute couture* are two distinct types of fashion with different economic rationales—the former hinges on mass production and the latter exclusivity. I couldn't help but wonder why he didn't show the clothes he was selling or sell the clothes he showed. I did not understand why there was such a remarkable disconnection between fashion show and fashion business even for such an experienced designer. I posed my question to fashion journalists and designers who attended the 2004 CFW, among whom was Ms. Wang.

Ms. Wang is a veteran fashion journalist working for a major Chinese fashion newspaper, whom I befriended during Shanghai Fashion Week a month before the CFW.⁶⁶ She accepted my interview at a café inside a bookstore after the CFW. She responded to my question about disparity between clothes in the show and those on the market by explaining that it had something to do with the fact the CFW was not clear with the categories of the shows and included both *haute couture* and *prêt-à-porter* collections. By contrast, the two types of

⁶⁵ As of 2004, Mark Cheung had five lines of clothing under his name: two lines in men's wear, one *prêt-à-porter* line for older women and one for younger women, and one line of women's jeans.

⁶⁶ There are two Shanghai Fashion Weeks, organized by different organizations. One is called *shishang zhou*, and the *shizhuang zhou*, but both are translated in English as "fashion week." I attended both fashion weeks in Shanghai in 2004, although the second one was held after the China Fashion Week in Beijing.

collections were shown in two different events, i.e., two different fashion weeks in Paris. Ms. Wang's point is clearly valid, but I was less concerned about whether Chinese fashion designers or CFA were confused about the distinctions between *haute couture* and *prêt-à-porter*; instead I was interested in finding out why Chinese fashion designers like Mark Cheung put so much emphasis on *haute couture* in their shows even while no *couture* brands or market existed in China. So I sharpened my question and raised it again to Ms. Wang. She directed her answer to the role of the media.

“That's because the artistically oriented *haute couture* catches the attention of the media, and there was no cheaper but more effective way to spread your name than doing a successful fashion show during the CFW,” Ms. Wang said. It is true that nearly all the Chinese fashion related media, sometimes entertainment related media, and some international media would congregate in Beijing and cover the CFW. This means that fashion designers, brands, and sponsors would get a week of free advertising on TV, in newspapers and magazines, on both the national and local levels. In the case of the major trade newspapers that I read, such as China Fashion Weekly and Fashion Times, the “free advertising” even lasted several months. The hype started long before the CFW, and the coverage included introducing in great detail the designers (and others such as the models) who would host fashion shows at the CFW, and speculating who would win the top awards. Weeks after the CFW, there were still photographs, fashion commentaries and analyses from the experts and editors. The biggest winners from the free media coverage are the award winners at the CFW, especially the Golden Top Award winner.

Ms. Wang's answer points to a key function of fashion show for the designers, that is, to promote their names. Success at the CFW, especially winning an award, leads to rapid national fame and visibility for the designer. If that goal should be achieved, the cost of producing a

fashion show, though not directly promoting the designer's *prêt-à-porter* lines, would appear to be insignificant compared to the amount of media exposure he or she would get.⁶⁷ Quick fame on the national stage can easily translate into economic gains in numerous ways, such as landing a better-paid job, winning financial backing to start a new line, and/or getting more customers. The career trajectories of earlier award winners, such as Mr. Yuan discussed in Chapter 4, powerfully validates such an approach to fashion shows at the CFW.

Therefore, although there are clear economic imperatives to the fashion shows at the CFW, for the designers the pursuit of commercial interests is only indirectly realized through the quest for fame, or symbolic capital if you will, during which the designers frequently resort to art. Just as fashion design has its own artistic and economic logics as I argued in Chapter 4, there are both economic and cultural rationales to fashion shows, especially those shows during the CFW. Using art, particularly motifs from traditional Chinese art (e.g., Mr. Cheung's use of traditional Chinese painting, music, and poetry), Chinese designers hope to achieve recognition on the national stage of the CFW and then quickly translate that recognition into financial success. This pattern perhaps has to do with the emergent nature of China's fashion industry, in the sense that Chinese designers hope to jumpstart their careers by winning awards at the CFW, just as the state hopes to jumpstart China's fashion industry by instituting a complex competition and award system through the CFW outlined previously. This leads to another point: Various parties or players in China's fashion industry have to work together to ensure the smooth working of the cultural economy of the CFW.

⁶⁷ According to CFA documents, the average cost of a show at the CFW is about two hundred thousand *yuan*, which includes the registration fee, rent of the show theater, and the production of show, but that does not include the cost to produce the garments, gift bags, press conference, or the post-show party.

Besides the fashion designers and the state (and its agent, the CFA) who have an interest in the award system,⁶⁸ the media also play a key role in the functioning of the CFW. Evidently, both the designers and the state need the media to spread the titles of the awards and the names of the winners. But the media create hype about the CFW, particularly the awards and their winners, not because it is an order from the state, but because they have an interest in doing so. Several journalists confirmed that the issues of their newspapers or magazines that cover the CFW reach the highest circulation of the entire year. Covering the awards at the CFW is a win-win situation for the media, the designers, and the CFA. The CFW is not just a mission for the CFA, but also a money making enterprise. As more and more designers are willing to participate in the CFW, the CFA generates more revenue through the registration fees. In addition, the media hype surrounding the awards also brings corporate sponsorship for the events at the CFW. For example, two large Chinese fashion companies sponsored the “New Designers Awards” at the 2004 CFW. Of course, the sponsors wanted to increase their media exposure by hyphenating their names with the awards. Therefore, the fashion designers, the media, the CFA (and by extension, the state), and the corporate sponsors (not including the financial backers of the designers) all share an interest in the economy of the CFW that centers on the awards that appear to be merely symbolic. To win those awards, subsequently to ensure the functioning of the economy of the CFW, the aspiring designers are compelled to be artistic and unique with their shows, including but not limited to the collections that they designed.

Although the focus on awards and publicity makes fashion designers gravitate toward artistically oriented *haute couture* shows, I have to concede that there are many *prêt-à-porter* shows as well during the CFW today. This in part has to do with increased participation of

⁶⁸ In addition to the awards for the designers, there are awards for the models and journalists as well at the CFW.

foreign designers who generally use their shows to promote their *prêt-à-porter* lines at the CFW. More importantly, the interests of the fashion designer and the company who financially supports the designer are not always aligned when it comes to producing a show that does not reflect the company's product lines. In the case of the designer who is not the owner of the fashion company, the company would be better off should the show directly promote the name of the company or its brands rather than that of the designer. Thus, it is not surprising that fashion companies would pressure their designers to show their *prêt-à-porter* collections during the CFW. Ms. Zhou, a fashion designer I interviewed during the CFW in 2004, is a strong believer of this explanation.

Ms. Zhou is Chief Designer of a women's wear company based in Dalian, and she was a winner of the "Top Ten Fashion Designers" award a few years ago (I learned of her award through the CFA documents because she only mentioned that she had done fashion shows at the CFW before). I met Ms. Zhou by accident during the 2004 CFW. We both went to in a small restaurant for lunch in the basement of the International Trade Center, which is adjacent to the China World Hotel, a major site of the CFW. Since it was busy lunch hour and perhaps too many customers were there because of the CFW, the waiter asked the customers to share tables, and I happened to share a table with Ms. Zhou who was dining alone. Through some courteous exchange of words, I found out that Ms. Zhou was a fashion designer. I introduced myself as a researcher on China's fashion industry and asked if she would accept an interview with me. She agreed. I joined her two days later in her interview with a group of fashion models at the Starbucks shop inside the building of the China World Hotel. Ms. Zhou did not do a show that year, and she went to the CFW mainly to interview and select models for photo shoots to be used

in the coming season's advertisements and to reunite with her fellow designers. After she sent the models off, our interview began.

She told me that when she showed her *prêt-à-porter* collection at the CFW a few years earlier, there were not that many designers showing them, but it became increasingly a trend that the designers would show *prêt-à-porter* (that they sell on the market) rather than unmarketable *haute couture* collections. I asked her why the designers had changed their approach. She said it was because the companies that financially supported the fashion designers realized that their actual lines on the market did not get any exposure in the previous years' fashion weeks; instead their support only helped the designers to achieve personal fame. Designers might then end up leaving the company for better jobs or might be tempted to start their own businesses on the side. I turned the subject to her personal experience and asked whether she felt the same constraint from her company when she showed her *prêt-à-porter* collection at the CFW. She said that she had a very good and stable working relationship with her boss, whom I later found out to be her elder sister. During the interview, I was quite impressed by her dedication to her company, and she even asked me to visit her company's stores in Beijing and Shanghai and offer her my feedback.⁶⁹ Ms. Zhou's example may be somewhat unique in her connection to her financial backer (her sister), but her point about the intricate relationship between fashion designers and their corporate backers was also confirmed by many other designers and journalists who I had talked to.

Therefore, the cultural economy of the CFW that centers on the awards seems to be complicated by the fashion companies that are interested in promoting their marketable *prêt-à-*

⁶⁹ After I visited her stores in Beijing and Shanghai and did some basic research on her company, I called her and followed up with an hour of interview on her line of clothes.

porter collections rather than the designers to whom they provide financial support. As a result, the current trend seems to be that there are more and more *prêt-à-porter* shows and less and less *haute couture* shows during the CFW. This trend, however, does not change the fact that there are enormous interests in the awards from various agents or players in the field including the designers, the CFA, the media, and the corporate sponsors (different from the financial backers of the designers). Because of the strong interest, the structure of awards at the CFW is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. As long as winning awards presents a shortcut to success, there will be efforts, especially from the designers, to emphasize their creative and artistic talent. Indeed, many designers included *couture* designs in their shows at the 2004 CFW without naming their shows as “*haute couture* collections” as Mark Cheung did, which made it difficult to calculate the exact numbers of *prêt-à-porter* shows and *haute couture* shows. Even for the established designers like Mark Cheung who do not need any more shortcuts to success, art is still a major means to try to stay at the cutting edge of fashion, i.e., to be continuously creative and artistic with their fashion shows. Because of all those factors, *couture* designs will likely remain conspicuous at the CFW, especially when the awards continue to be a center piece of the CFW.

This pattern of the CFW is different from London Fashion Week, which only shows *prêt-à-porter* collections. But it is not the only feature of the CFW that is unique. The spatial and temporal structure of the CFW also reflects distinctive characteristics of the Chinese field of fashion when it is contrasted to the LFW.

5.7 CFW AS THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE CHINESE FIELD OF FASHION

In their study of London Fashion Week, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) make the observation that the gates and gate-keepers map out the boundary of the British field of fashion. Indeed, a similar observation can be made about the CFW. The controlled access to the CFW events does to some extent delineate a relatively autonomous space, and the tickets and invitations generally symbolize membership to the Chinese field of fashion. However, there are also key differences between the CFW and the LFW, and by extension, between the Chinese field of fashion and its British counterpart.

The first major difference has to do with the seating arrangements inside the show theater. According to Entwistle and Rocamora, the front-row seats in the show theater are more privileged than the back-row seats as they enjoy better views and are more easily seen by others in the audience, or as they put it, the front-row seats enjoy the advantage of both “seeing and being seen” (2006: 742-5).⁷⁰ They argue that the distinction in the seating arrangements displays and reaffirms the distinguished positions of the occupants of the front-row seats in the British field of fashion who are typically celebrities, fashion icons, renowned journalists and designers, and so on. From my own field research, this pattern is also observed at the CFW: the front-row seats in the show theater are clearly privileged and are generally reserved for the judges and the invited VIP guests of the host designer, while the back-row seats are for the general audience with tickets. But different from the LFW, there is a lack of participation of celebrities and fashion icons at the CFW, and the front-row occupants are generally the host designer’s fellow designers, friends, VIP customers, as well as the judges selected by the CFA. More importantly,

⁷⁰ In a study of fashion shows, Kondo also notes that the audiences of the fashion show gaze at each other and thus perform for each other (see Kondo 1997: 103).

the most privileged seats at the CFW are not the front-row seats on the two sides of the runway; instead, they are located at the foot of the T-stage, right in front of the media and their cameras. These seats are reserved by the CFA for their own officials, government officials (such as the mayor of Beijing), and other distinguished guests. Consequently, they enjoy the central and most commanding view of the show, and are most easily seen by others in the audience as well. Therefore, although the CFW and the LFW are similar in that the seats in the theater map out and thus reproduce the hierarchy within the field of fashion, the seating arrangements at the CFW serve as a constant reminder that political power, especially the power of the state, is literally “front and center” in the Chinese field of fashion.

In addition to the spatial display of “distinctions” in the theater space, Entwistle and Rocamora point out that the temporal structure of the fashion show also suggests hierarchy, in the sense that those who enjoy the highest status in the fashion field tend to be “fashionably late” for the show (2006: 742). Once again, here the CFW differs from the LFW. As my experience of Mark Cheung’s show indicates, the ones who tend to be late are not necessarily those who are fashionable, but those who are in power (in fact, the show would not start without them). Similarly, the last show (by Mark Cheung) at the CFW also seems to be the most important one, which is crystallized in the Chinese phrase of “*yazhou xi*” (the last and most important show). Thus, congruent with the spatial structure of the shows, the temporal structure of the shows also indicates the significance of power at the CFW. Given that the state (and its agents) was deeply involved in the development of the fashion industry and in the establishment of the CFA, it is not surprising that the power of the state features so prominently at the CFW.

Therefore, if we follow Entwistle and Rocamora’s argument that the institution of fashion week maps out and reproduces the field of fashion, then we have to promptly add that the

uniqueness of the Chinese field of fashion is that it is wide open when it comes to the power of the state. To make this point clear, I have to return to Bourdieu's field theory, which provides the theoretical framework for Entwistle and Rocamora's study of the LFW. As noted in Chapter 4, Bourdieu's notion of a field is defined as "a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except, obviously, in the case of the economic and political fields" (Johnson 1996: 6). Following this notion, Entwistle and Rocamora conceptualize the British field of fashion as an autonomous space independent of politics, although they clearly acknowledge the existence of power at the London Fashion Week to the extent that various players are hierarchically positioned in the field. By contrast, the Chinese field of fashion as objectified by the CFW is not completely autonomous in relation to political power, though the boundary of the field is enacted during the CFW through the mechanisms of gates, gate-keepers, tickets, and invitations. Different from the British field of fashion, state power overrides the boundary of the Chinese field of fashion and becomes internal to the field—government officials do not need tickets or invitations to get into the fashion shows and yet maintain privileged seats, which reflect their privileged positions in the Chinese field of fashion. Hence, like the LFW, the CFW is an objectification of the Chinese field of fashion, but unlike the British field of fashion, state power is featured "front and center" in the Chinese field. Without further research, I can only suggest that this characteristic of the Chinese field of fashion is perhaps due to the fact that China is still not a democratic society and that the emergence of the Chinese fashion industry was the result of the state induced market reform.

5.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examined Chinese fashion shows and China Fashion Week, a major event that brings together various players in China's fashion industry. As an imported institution, China Fashion Week maintains some similarities to Western fashion weeks. Building on Entwistle and Rocamora's insights about London Fashion Week, I argue that China Fashion Week is an objectification of the Chinese field of fashion, in the sense that various positions in the field are rendered visible through temporal and spatial arrangements at China Fashion Week and by so doing the structure of the field positions are reproduced. However, China Fashion Week is also localized in significant ways; there are major differences between China Fashion Week and London Fashion Week.

One of the key differences is the elaborate award structure of the CFW, which was set up by the CFA to jumpstart China's fashion industry. The awards of CFW lead Chinese fashion designers towards showing artistically oriented *haute couture* designs rather than showing their *prêt-à-porter* collections that are sold on the market. The divergence between the clothes on the runway and the clothes on the market is caused by the designers' belief that unique and artistic designs are better positioned to win awards at the CFW, which could lead to instant national fame and which in turn could lead to faster or greater financial success. This approach to fashion shows at the CFW has also been proven to be a viable shortcut to success by the career trajectories of many designers who were earlier awards winners. Although the financial backers of the designers do not directly benefit from the awards and subsequently pressure the designers to show their *prêt-à-porter* collections, the creative *couture* designs are able to find their way onto the runways of the CFW. Besides the designers, the media, the CFA, and the corporate sponsors all share an interest in maintaining the attention-catching awards of the CFW.

Consequently, fashion shows during China Fashion Week, though they are evidently platforms of commercial promotions, contain uniquely Chinese rationale, which has to do with the need for China to quickly spread the names of Chinese fashion designers and speed up the development of the fashion industry.

Another major difference between the CFW and the LFW is the position of political power in the field of fashion. As Entwistle and Rocamora observe, the boundaries set up at London Fashion Week indicate that the British field of fashion is an autonomous space that is independent of politics. In contrast, the Chinese fashion field as objectified by China Fashion Week reserves privileged positions for government officials. The prominent presence of government officials at China Fashion Week not only indicates the connections between the state and the CFA, but also serves as a reminder that the field of fashion is embedded in Chinese society where the power of the state and the Communist Party is a dominant force that can penetrate any relatively autonomous fields at will.

The Chinese characteristics of fashion shows and fashion week suggest that fashion shows, particularly those during the CFW, are not just commercial means to promote fashion, but also “localized” strategies for the designers and other players to obtain better positions in the field of fashion. Because China Fashion Week is embedded in Chinese society, an ethnographic approach is needed to unravel the cultural economy of China Fashion Week, and subsequently the Chinese field of fashion.

In the next chapter, I will further explore the boundary (this time the geographic boundary) of the Chinese field of fashion, and focus on the exportation of Chinese made clothing to the United States. I will examine the relationship between the two fields of Chinese clothing

industry and the U.S. clothing industry through the main material connections between them, i.e., the movement of finished garments from China to the United States.

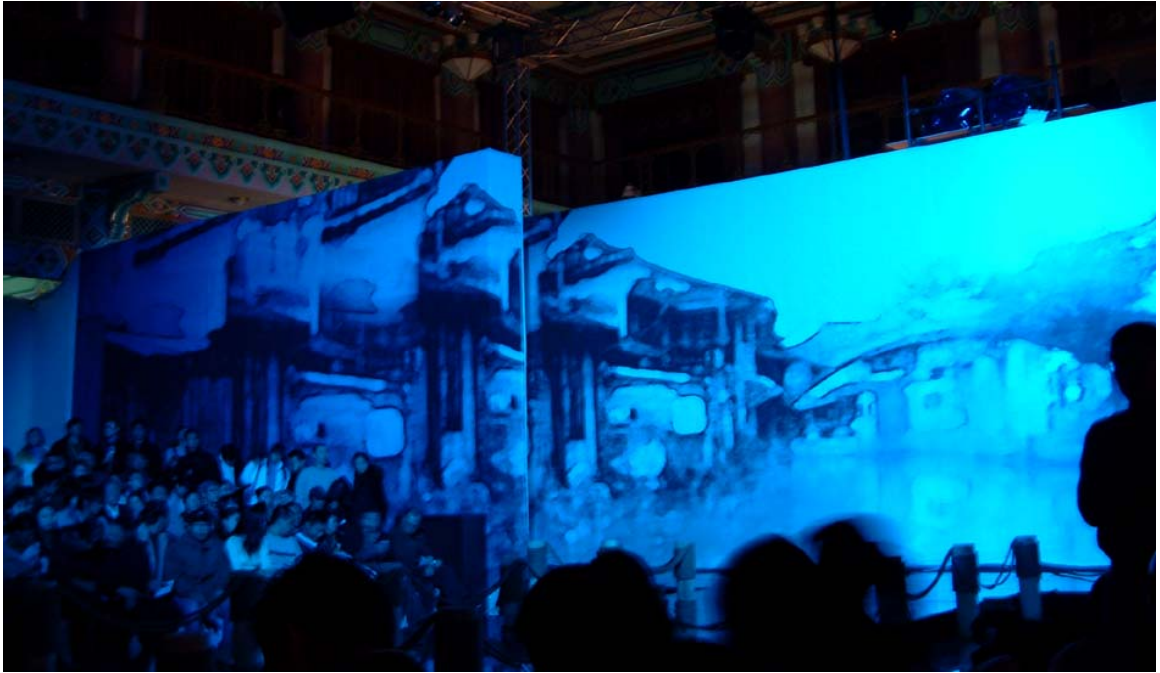


Image 1: Backdrop of Mark Cheung's Show



Image 2: A Model Wearing a Mark Cheung Day Wear



Image 3: A Model Wearing an Evening Gown by Mark Cheung

6.0 GLOBALIZATION: A CLOTHING PERSPECTIVE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The winter of 2005 was a joyful time for the Pittsburgh Steelers' fans, because their team did the almost impossible. It went into the postseason as a wild card team and upset all the "stronger" teams on the road and was on its way to win the Super Bowl. The joy spread far beyond Pittsburgh and the United States. Mr. Zeng, a friend of mine who lives in Shanghai, China and works in the business of international garment trade, was so excited for me that he sent me a Steelers jersey via FedEx. The Steelers jerseys, as I was told by Mr. Zeng, were in high demand and mine was a sample for the follow-up orders from Reebok (merged with Adidas since 2006), the sportswear giant that makes jerseys for the U.S. National Football League (NFL).

My Steelers jersey, although in the form of a sample and then a gift, was made along with millions of other garments in China that were bound for consumption in the United States. The previous chapters of this dissertation have focused on the domestic aspects of China's clothing and fashion industry. But, the Chinese clothing industry does not exist in isolation; instead, it has significant global connections. To continue using the concept of "field" borrowed from Bourdieu, international trade provides the linkage between the fields of the Chinese clothing industry and the global clothing industry. In fact, this linkage is a key component of the Chinese clothing industry. As discussed in Chapter 2, the export of apparel is crucial to China's clothing industry and the overall Chinese economy: China's clothing exports account for over a quarter of

the world's total export of garments and it has been a critical hard currency earner for China to finance its modernization projects and to keep millions of workers employed. The U.S. market is particularly important to the Chinese clothing industry, as it is the largest single country importer of Chinese made garments, which accounted for about 23.1 percent of China's garment exports in 2003.⁷¹ In the same year, China was also the largest garment exporter to the United States, capturing 16.9 percent of the total U.S. imports of clothing.

In this chapter, I explore the global connections of China's clothing industry by looking at China's exportation of apparel. In particular, I focus on the trade dispute between the United States and China with regard to textile and apparel products in 2005. I examine how various parties are connected through Chinese made garments and how different meanings are mapped onto those goods at different sites. By so doing, I join the anthropological critique of the global homogenization or Westernization thesis and argue that the meanings of the global goods are always locally constructed (Friedman 1991; Howes 1996; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Furthermore, I argue that while the various meanings of the Chinese made clothing are constructed at different sites and thus they are disconnected from each other, the movement of the goods connects various interested persons and groups into a global network, and this global network is a crucial mechanism for the interested parties to act and react to each other and at the same time provides a vital channel through which power unevenly impact the interested persons and groups that are involved in the network. Through the study of Chinese apparel exports, I propose a "clothing perspective" to the anthropological study of globalization. To fully explicate this perspective, I

⁷¹ As an aggregate, the European Union is the largest importer of Chinese made clothing. In terms of market share, Japan has the highest percentage of imports of Chinese clothing, which accounts for more than 70 percent of Japan's clothing imports.

have to first briefly review recent studies on globalization in anthropology, especially those on the transnational flow of goods.

6.2 TRANSNATIONAL FLOW OF GOODS, GLOBALIZATION THEORIES, AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

“Following the thing,” as suggested by George Marcus (1995), is one of the “tracking” strategies for anthropologists to study the complex phenomena of globalization. Even though goods move in various directions in the world, recent anthropological studies of the transnational flow of goods have mostly focused on goods that originate from the developed West and flow into the developing rest. According to these studies, Western goods are not simply material objects, but also cultural symbols that possess transformative power and provide a catalyst to cultural change in the receiving societies. The film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* provides a good albeit fictional illustration of how a Western object, in this case a coke bottle that fell out of an airplane, leads to a series of political and cultural changes among a !Kung tribe in the Kalahari Desert. Western objects such as the coke bottle among the !Kung are generally recognized by scholars, sometimes as “social hieroglyphics” that are coded with a set of production relations (Marx 1967: 74) and sometimes as a “fetish” (Marx 1967; Taussig 1993) that are laden with potent transformative power. However, with regard to the nature of the changes brought about by those Western goods, scholars have different views. One view holds that the inflow of Western goods ushers changes in non-Western societies in the image of the West and consequently leads to a “global homogenization” or Westernization. George Ritzer (2000), for example, thinks that McDonald’s is engulfing the world and creating an effect of “McDonaldization” of societies

(also see Schlosser 2001). Similarly, other scholars have named the global homogenization thesis as “Coca-Colonization” of the world, referring to the intrusion of Coca-Cola into non-Western societies (see Hannerz 1992b: 217; Howes 1996: 1-16). In effect, what the global homogenization thesis argues is a form of Western cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991, 1997).

Anthropologists, however, generally disagree with the global homogenization paradigm, and believe that the global goods are subject to local resistance and/or appropriation and consequently the global becomes contextualized, hybridized, creolized, or localized (e.g. Howes 1996; Friedman 1991). Aside from the prominent example of McDonald’s and its localized consumption practices (e.g. Watson 1997; Traphagan and Brown 2002), local consumption of Western textiles, clothing, and toys are also studied by anthropologists. Emma Tarlo (1996) points out that the *swadeshi* (or homespun) movement in India was initiated by Gandhi in order to resist British textiles and as a means to fight for the overall national independence. Jean Comaroff (1997) records that although European styles of clothing were adopted by the Africans (beginning in the nineteenth century with the British mission to “civilize” the Africans), they were also juxtaposed and sometimes even syncretized with the local folk dress, and the two types of clothing jointly constituted a complex relationship between dress and the politics of ethnicity and class. Grewal’s (1999) example of how Barbie dolls didn’t sell in India until they were dressed in saris also shows how the global and the local are reconfigured simultaneously at their encounter. These studies demonstrate that Western-made goods are always “remade” once they move into a non-Western context. In fact, my study of fashion design and fashion shows in China in Chapters 4 and 5 also supports the argument that the inflow of Western goods and practices does not create a mirror image of the West in China, and hence it joins a growing anthropological effort to challenge the global homogenization thesis.

This chapter, however, looks at the reverse flow of goods from China to the West, the United States in particular. Studies of goods flowing from the Third World to the First World are evidently less common, and primarily focus on raw materials such as sugar (Mintz 1985), other foods and crafts (Kasfir 1999; Silverman 1999). Similar to the works reviewed above, the flow of goods from the rest to the West also involve two processes of “de-territorialization” and “re-territorialization” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002), in the sense that the meanings of the goods change from their place of production to their place of consumption. Sidney Mintz’s (1985) study of sugar is a classic example. He finds that when the meaning of sugar changed from a delicacy, medicine, or spice to a daily necessity for the working class in Europe, it concomitantly became a means of survival for the workers in the sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Mintz’s work also suggests that the meanings of non-Western goods are frequently wrought with the political economy that frames the unequal relationship between the West and the rest. Jane Collins’s study on Brazil’s international trade of grapes provides another example. She indicates that changes in Western consumption patterns, specifically the increasing standardization of consumer environment in the West has unevenly impacted grape producers in Brazil; large farms that can afford the refrigerated distribution infrastructure are winning greater market shares at the expense of small farms that ironically produce better grapes. As a result, what considered good locally in Brazil in terms of the products does not translate into good business that is largely shaped by international capital (Collins: 2000). Mintz’s study of sugar and Collins’s study of grapes not only point out that the different meanings are associated with the goods in different locations, but also emphasize the connections between people in different locations established through the movement of the goods. The connection is important because it forms a network through which power is unevenly distributed and conditions the movement of the goods.

Network analysis is also applied by some scholars to the transnational flow of Western goods. Robert Foster's study of Coca-Cola is an excellent example (2002: 151-174). Foster observes that Coca-Cola provides a network that connects Roberto C. Goizueta, the former chairman and CEO of the Coca-Cola Company based in the United States, to an average consumer such as Elizabeth Solomon (pseudonym) in Papua New Guinea. While non-Western consumers such as Ms. Solomon were imagined by the company's executives like Mr. Goizueta as human vessels to be filled with more and more cola, for Ms. Solomon, an old lady, the drink symbolizes "the white man's world entangling her children and grandchildren in urban Port Moresby" (Foster 2002:171). Through the network of Coca-Cola, Mr. Goizueta and Ms. Solomon constitute each other's context in which they construct their own meanings of the commodity. Forster's study of Coca-Cola more explicitly explained how seemingly disconnected meanings are mapped onto the commodity that paradoxically connects them into a common network.

Like Mintz's study of sugar and Collins's study of grapes, Foster's use of "network analysis" of Coca-Cola provides a methodological tool to study the movement of garments from China to the United States. Building on the insights of these exemplary studies, this chapter proposes a "clothing perspective" to study both the global disconnections of meanings attached to the Chinese made garments in different locations and the global connections between various interested persons and groups in China and the United States.

The utilization of a "network analysis" does not conflict with the "field analysis" in previous chapters. The "network" here is constituted through the movement of the Chinese made garments, and the persons and groups connected to the network through those garments are in fact what I refer to as "the agents or players" in the field of the clothing industry. While the

approach of “field analysis” has strength in studying the internal dynamics of the field, i.e., the clothing industry, a network analysis has the advantage of examining the connections between separate fields, here the fields of the Chinese and U.S. clothing industries. In addition, in a network analysis, specific field positions, such as those occupied by workers, designers, and executives, are not always important distinctions; instead common interests may be shared by those who occupy different field positions. As we shall see later, common interests rather than differences in field positions matter more in the network constituted by the transnational movement of the Chinese made garments. I use “persons and groups” (sometimes interested parties) instead of “agents or players” in this chapter intentionally in order to avoid the association with specific field positions and their inherent attributes and distinctions. Before I apply a network analysis to the Chinese exportation of clothing to the United States, some background information is needed to understand how the Chinese and U.S. clothing industries become connected, which has to do with the nature of the apparel industry.

6.3 “AN IMPERFECT INDUSTRY”

The apparel industry (as well as the textile industry) has been closely connected to industrialization and modernization since the Industrial Revolution started in Britain in the 18th century. Yet, no matter how advanced the technologies have become over the years, one of the key operations of the industry remains the same, that is, it requires human operators sitting behind sewing machines to stitch the garments. Consequently, labor is one of the major components of the cost of the garments, and worse yet, a “flexible” cost. To reduce costs, the apparel industry in the United States (as well as in Britain and elsewhere) constantly seeks to

exploit cheap labor both at home and abroad. The labor intensive nature and the exploitation of labor in the apparel industry lead Joanne Entwistle to call it “an imperfect industry” (Entwistle 2000: 212). The labor intensive but not capital or technology intensive nature of the apparel industry also means that the cost or barrier of entry into the industry is low, so much so that the apparel industry is frequently a major means for developing countries such as China to kick off their industrialization process and grow their economy. Consequently, the need for the U.S. apparel industry to outsource its labor-intensive manufacturing in order to reduce costs is met with the need for China (and other developing countries) to develop its economy.

U.S. apparel firms’ strategy to outsource their manufacturing operations to developing countries where cheap labor is abundant is a part of the post-Fordist flexible accumulation, a process that has become significantly pronounced since the 1970s (Harvey 1989: 145; Kilduff 2005). Since the 1990s China has become a major choice of destination for sourcing for the U.S. importers and retailers. However, the current turn by the U.S. firms to China is but a continuation of this pattern of production in Japan, then Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan in earlier decades (Bonacich and Waller 1994: 21-22). This pattern of production involves both Western firms and Chinese suppliers. The Western firms typically control the brand, distribution, and marketing, and they are called the “original brand manufacturers” (OBM).⁷² The Chinese suppliers are only responsible for the production of the garments, and they are called “original equipment manufacturers” (OEM). In the case of my Steelers’ jersey, the Chinese factory that made the garment is the OEM, while Reebok is the OBM. The distinctions between the two types of manufacturers have significant implications. The OBM controls the high value-added processes (such design and marketing), while the OEM the low value-added

⁷² Sometimes, they are also called “original design manufacturers” (ODM).

processes (such as assembly and packaging). In monetary terms, about 75 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the garments would go to the OBM, while just about 25 percent (often less than that) would go to the OEM. Moreover, because the OBM controls the brand and the access to the market, it has much greater power over the OEM. For example, if the OEM couldn't meet the demands of the OBM, the OBM could simply replace them with other OEM suppliers in or outside China. The fundamental power imbalance between the OEM and the OBM also reflects the unequal relationship between China and the United States, which is particularly conspicuous when it comes to the international trade treaties and regimes pertaining to textiles and apparel.

6.4 IMPERFECT INTERNATIONAL TRADE REGIMES

Although the U.S. corporations (as well as the consumers) benefit from outsourcing their garment manufacturing, such acts would also result in job losses in the United States, particularly in southern states such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia where the textile and apparel industries are concentrated. To prevent job losses in the textile and apparel industries, the U.S. worker and labor unions, and relevant interest groups are aligned with local and federal politicians and have made the textile and apparel industries one of the most protected industries in the United States.

In the 1950s, the United States instituted protective measures such as the Voluntary Export Restraint (VER) against the imports of Japanese cotton products. However, this protective measure failed because it actually led to dramatic increase of imports from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the 1960s, the Kennedy administration tried to remedy the shortcomings

of the VER by instituting the Short Term Arrangement on Cotton Textiles (STA) and later the Long Term Arrangement for Cotton Textiles (LTA), in order to expand the restrictions on imports of cotton products from Japan to other U.S. trading partners. But the STA and the LTA also failed because the textile and apparel industries quickly shifted from cotton products to wool and man-made fibers that were not then restricted by those trade regimes. The continued loss of jobs in the U.S. textile and apparel industries led to further expansion of protection. In 1974, the United States successfully negotiated an international treaty called the “Multi-fiber Arrangement” (MFA), which allowed the United States (as well as Europe and Canada) to restrict textile and apparel imports from developing countries to limited quantities adjustable only on an annual basis. The quota system of the MFA was the most comprehensive and long-lasting protective trade regime against U.S. imports of textile and apparel products.⁷³

The MFA was an unfair trade agreement, and it clearly violated the principles of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the dominant international trade regime since World War II that included most countries in the world as members (socialist countries such as China were not members of the GATT). As acknowledged by the U.S. International Trade Commission, the MFA departed from the GATT specifically in two respects: “(1) they [the quotas] were applied on a country-specific basis, in contradiction of the nondiscrimination obligation (all GATT members be treated equally when any trade measures are applied), and (2) they contradict the general principle of reducing or avoiding absolute quantitative limits” (U.S. ITC 2004: 8). Consequently, the developing countries, whose clothing exports were unfairly restricted by quotas assigned to them by the developed importing countries such as the United States, attempted repeatedly to eliminate the MFA through multilateral negotiations under the

⁷³ For the brief history of the U.S. trade protection against textile and apparel imports, see Rivoli 2005: 127-130.

framework of the GATT, and it became a major agenda of the “Uruguay Round” (1986-1994). In 1994, an agreement was reached under the framework of the GATT that the MFA quota system would gradually phase out over a ten-year period and be completely removed by January 1, 2005. As the GATT was superseded by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, the agreement was replaced by the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) with the same intent to phase out the MFA within the same time frame (Scott 1998). Nevertheless, before 2005, the exportation of most Chinese made textile and apparel products to the United States had been subjected to quota restrictions sanctioned by the U.S. government under the MFA.

As a member of the WTO (since December 2001), China was supposed to enjoy the full benefit of quota-free export of textile and apparel products to the United States in 2005 after the new trade regime of the ATC went into effect. However, when China negotiated with the United States in 1999 for its accession to the WTO, the United States (the European Union later followed suit) added a particular safeguard clause called Paragraph 242 in the bilateral agreement, which allows the U.S. government to impose temporary quotas on the U.S. imports of textile and clothing from China up until December 2008 if such imports from China have caused “the existence or threat of market disruption” (Paragraph 242 of The Working Party Report on China’s Accession to the WTO). Like the MFA, Paragraph 242, which specifically targets textile and apparel imports from China (but not from other countries), unfairly privileges the United States and violates the fair trade and nondiscrimination principles of the WTO and the ATC that aims to eliminate import quotas. That fact that the United States was able to successfully negotiate with China to include such a clause in their bilateral agreement indicates the imbalance of power between the United States and China, especially in economic and

political terms. Nevertheless, the contradiction between Paragraph 242 and the ATC became the source of a heated trade dispute between the two countries in 2005.

6.5 THE U.S.-CHINA TEXTILE AND APPAREL TRADE DISPUTE IN 2005

By January 2005, under the ATC all the U.S. quotas of the imports of textile and clothing products were eliminated, which resulted in a dramatic surge of U.S. imports of textile and clothing from China. Several product categories increased over 100 and even 1000 percent of those in the same period in 2004. The surge was caused in part by the fact that the U.S. government withheld quota restrictions on the majority of the product categories until the end of 2004 rather than lifting them gradually as they had agreed to in the 1994 GATT agreement (U.S. GAO report, April 2005, p. 10), and the sudden elimination of all the quotas was coupled with large demands for cheap and good quality products from China. Yet, the surge of U.S. imports of Chinese textile and clothing was reported widely by the U.S. media as a “flood” and “threat” (e.g. the New York Times, 03/10/2005). On April 6, 2005, seven petitions were filed by American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition (AMTAC), National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO), National Textile Association (NTA), and the labor union UNITE HERE, requesting the U.S. government to take safeguard actions against the importation of seven categories of Chinese textile and clothing products. More petitions continued to be filed by the same groups later in June, July, and up until November when a new broad agreement was reached between the governments of the United States and China. On May 13, the Committee for the Implementation of Textile Agreements (CITA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce invoked Paragraph 242 and initiated threat-based safeguard quotas against the importation of

three product categories of textile and clothing products with Chinese origin. Five days later, CITA decided to impose safeguard quotas limiting the importation of four more categories of Chinese made textile and clothing products, citing Paragraph 242 (<http://otexa.ita.doc.gov>).⁷⁴ Since then, a lengthy and heated textile and apparel trade dispute broke out between the United States and China.

Soon after the U.S. decision on limiting Chinese textile and apparel imports, the two governments followed the procedure under the WTO agreement and began consultation and negotiation. While the U.S. government cited Paragraph 242 to justify its decisions, the Chinese government invoked its rights as a member of the WTO and the quota-free trade agreement of the ATC that both sides signed as members of the WTO. The two sides were so adamant on their positions that it took eight rounds of consultation and negotiation for the two governments to finally reach a new broad agreement on November 8, 2005,⁷⁵ which far exceeded the three-month period of consultation stipulated in Paragraph 242. The negotiation process took so long that before the agreement was reached some categories of the Chinese products already exceeded the limits of the quotas and were subsequently withheld by the U.S. Customs Office. As mentioned earlier, before the new agreement was reached, the U.S. government continued to issue quotas to limit the importation of new product categories from China in order to step up the pressure on the Chinese government. At the same time, the U.S. government did not unilaterally declare those safeguard measures permanent as it could after the required three-month

⁷⁴ These seven categories include cotton knit shirts and blouses (category 338/339); cotton trousers (category 347/348); cotton and man-made fiber underwear (category 352/652); men's and boy's cotton and man-made fiber shirts, not knit (category 340/640); man-made fiber trousers (category 647/648), man-made fiber knit shirts and blouses (category 638/639), and combed cotton yarn (category 301). More categories were imposed with safeguard quotas later during the negotiation and consultation process.

⁷⁵ This agreement is entitled "memorandum of understanding between the governments of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China concerning trade in textile and apparel products," available at: <http://www.ustr.gov>.

consultation period expired; instead, it continued to negotiate with the Chinese government for fear of an escalation of the trade dispute. In the end, both sides compromised in the new broad agreement: China accepted quotas on 34 categories of textile and apparel products exporting to the United States from 2005 through 2008, much broader than the existing 19 product categories under temporary safeguard restrictions, while the United States raised the percentage of annual increase of its importation of the safeguarded Chinese textile and apparel products, from 7.5 percent as stipulated in Paragraph 242 to between 10 and 17 percent from 2005 through the end of 2008 (when all the quotas on Chinese textile and clothing imports would be finally lifted). The U.S. also agreed to allow entry of the Chinese imports withheld by the U.S. Customs due to quota limits, with an understanding that the quantity exceeding the new annual quota limits would be in half “subsidized” by the United States and the other half counted toward the quotas of those product categories for the next year.

The new agreement between the United States and China, though a compromise between the two, is far from a fair trade agreement. Above all, the privilege of the United States is protected by Paragraph 242, and the final agreement is but an enactment of Paragraph 242, albeit in a more lenient way. Just as the U.S. OBM buyers have the upper hand over the Chinese OEM suppliers, the advantage of the United States over China in terms of trade can be attributed to the fact that the United States is buying more from China than the other way around. However, just because the United States has the upper hand, does not explain why it exercises that privilege. After all, it is not in everyone’s interests to limit the imports from China. Because the quotas are sold in China, they become extra costs to the garments.⁷⁶ The U.S. corporate buyers (importers,

⁷⁶ The quotas are free from the U.S. government, but the Chinese government sells them to the Chinese manufacturers. Quotas are also available in the “black market,” sold by the profiteers.

retailers, and outsourcing manufacturers) would in many ways be better off without the extra costs of the quotas, and so would the U.S. consumers. To understand why the U.S. government imposes quota limits on clothing imports from China, we have to examine the different positions and interests within the U.S. textile and apparel industries, which I divide into opposition to and support for apparel imports from China.

6.5.1 Strong Opposition from Domestically-based U.S. Manufacturers and Workers

As previously mentioned, the rise in the U.S. importation of Chinese made clothing was reported by the media as a “flood” and “threat,” by connotation, something needed to be contained. No one else had taken this threat more seriously than the domestically-based U.S. textile and garment manufacturers and workers. From their position, the imports from China represent competition and a threat to their own market shares and/or jobs. To protect their own interests, they tend to overstate the threat of imports from China and eagerly demand the U.S. government for more protection.⁷⁷ Representing their interests, various groups and organizations such as the AMTAC, NCTO, NTA, UNITE HERE, and DMC (Domestic Manufacturers Committee of the Hosiery Association) lobbied policy makers in Washington D.C. vehemently for safeguard protection against imports from China in 2005, which turned out to be rather successful.

⁷⁷ For example, the American Textile Manufacturers Institute, in a study entitled “The China Threat to World Textile and Apparel Trade,” estimated that China would take over 2/3 of the U.S. market in 24 months after the quotas were lifted in 2005. Many scholars believe that such a scenario is unlikely given that a host of factors including cost are involved in the U.S. corporations’ sourcing decisions (e.g. Abernathy et al. 2004).

6.5.2 Support from U.S. Corporate Buyers and Consumers

To the U.S. corporate buyers, including importers, retailers, and manufacturers that outsource their production to China, however, clothing imported from China is not a threat, but a good deal. In a survey of a large number of U.S. corporate buyers conducted by the U.S. International Trade Commission in order to assess the competitiveness of certain foreign suppliers to the U.S. market, the Commission states, “China is expected to become the ‘supplier of choice’ for most U.S. importers (the large apparel companies and retailers) because of its ability to make almost any type of textile and apparel product at any quality level at a competitive price” (p. xi). Clearly, the views of the China-made garments shared by the U.S. corporate buyers differ from those of the domestically-based manufacturers, workers, and the interest groups that represent them. As mentioned above, the consumers would also be better off without the quotas, so consumers should have an interest in supporting the Chinese imports as well, although they should not be seen as a unified group because many consumers take many other factors such as quality, environmental concerns, and fair labor practices, etc., besides price, into consideration when it comes to their decisions of buying.

The diverse views and interests raise the question why only the voices of the domestically-based U.S. workers and manufacturers, but not those of the U.S. corporate buyers and consumers seemed to have been heard by the U.S. policy makers in their handling of the U.S.-China textile and garment trade dispute in 2005. Economist Pietra Rivoli’s (2005) study of the global textile and apparel industries provides valuable insights to the U.S. trade policy making process.

Rivoli attributes the frequent wins of protectionism in the U.S. textile and clothing trade to two major factors. One factor is what she regards as the “snarling together” phenomenon

among the interest groups, such as AMTAC, NCTO, NTA, and UNITE HERE (she calls them an “alphabet army”), who represent the interests of the domestically-based U.S. manufacturers and workers (Rivoli 2005:123). These interest groups are able to speak with a single voice because the U.S. textile and apparel industries are geographically and historically concentrated in the southern states such as the Carolinas and Georgia, and this concentration is further strengthened by a shared cultural and historical bond among the textile manufacturers. By contrast, the U.S. corporate buyers are not as unified; organizations such as the National Retail Federation (NRF) represent diverse interests ranging from the interests of a small tourist shop to those of Saks Fifth Avenue, and thus they have a much harder time speaking in unison. I would also add to Rivoli’s point here that the geographical diversity of the importers (including the retailers) separates them into different voting districts, which makes them less effective than their geographically concentrated rivals in their concerted efforts to influence the policy makers. Nevertheless, Rivoli thinks that the voice of protectionism in unison is generally met with sympathy from the American voters who rather tolerate this type of protectionism than hear news that another American factory is being closed and another American community being destroyed due to job losses resulted from outsourcing.

The voting behavior of American public leads to Rivoli’s second factor that contributes to protectionism in the U.S. textile and apparel trade, which has a lot to do with the politics of deal-making in Washington D.C. As Rivoli puts it, the access to the U.S. market is treated by the politicians as a “currency,” to be traded for votes, for foreign policy favors (such as for Pakistan’s help in the war against terrorism), and sometimes ironically for the same interest groups who advocate protectionism to accept broader trade liberalizing initiatives (124).

Therefore, protectionism in the U.S. textile and apparel trade is very useful, if not essential, for political purposes in the eyes of American politicians.

Although Rivoli did not study the 2005 U.S.-China textile and apparel trade dispute per se, her analyses of the processes of the U.S. trade policy making help explain how the different positions on the U.S. imports of China-made clothing were only translated into a largely protectionist though compromised safeguard policy adopted by the U.S. government in November 2005. In the politics of deal making and negotiation, the concerted voice of domestically-based U.S. manufacturers and workers is much more powerful than disconcerted ones of U.S. corporate buyers. Similarly, this also explains why the voices of average American consumers, who clearly have an interest in this issue, are largely absent in the U.S. government's decision making process on the textile and apparel trade policies—they are too diverse to be meaningful to the politicians, especially when it comes to votes during elections. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find an average American consumer, who is not in the above-mentioned categories of the interest groups, would go to the public hearings held by CITA in Washington D.C. to voice his or her support for more imports of Chinese made clothing because he or she would be able to save a few bucks. As a matter of fact, the imports from China could be easily replaced by equally cheap if not cheaper imports from elsewhere. So, it is unlikely even for those cost conscious consumers to voice their support for imports from any single foreign country, let alone those consumers who are more concerned about environmental and social factors than costs. As a result, politics rather than economic rationale dominates the decision making process in this largely economic matter of textile and apparel trade dispute with China in 2005.

6.5.3 The Chinese Side

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, there are multiple positions occupied by various agents or players, such as designers, models, workers, and so on, in the field of the Chinese clothing industry. But the differences among these players (and their positions) are internal; when it comes to the export of Chinese made garments, they share a common interest, that is, to eliminate the discriminatory quota system and expand the international market share of the garments they make. Because China is not yet a democracy, the Chinese government is solely responsible to represent their interests. Interests of the textile and apparel industries are very important to China; after all, China's textile and apparel industries employ about 19 million workers.⁷⁸ Yet in the end, the Chinese government gave in to the U.S. pressure and signed the new agreement that is largely favorable to the United States. Such a resolution is in some ways expected. First of all, this is because of the existence of the discriminatory clause of Paragraph 242 against China, which eventually framed the resolution. Second, in terms of trade with the United States, China exports more than it imports from the United States. There are simply not enough bargaining chips at the disposal of the Chinese government. Third, aside from the interests in the textile and apparel industries, China also received pressure from the United States on other issues such as the intellectual property rights and currency appreciation.⁷⁹ The Chinese government could not prioritize the interests of the textile and apparel industries over all other

⁷⁸ The Chinese Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai made the comment on the social significance of the Chinese textile and apparel industries during the press conference after he signed the new trade agreement with the U.S. Trade Representative, Rob Portman, on November 8, 2005. The transcript of the press conference is available at: http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Transcripts/

⁷⁹ During the 16th annual U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) meeting, which was held in July 2005, the Chinese media have reported the debated issues including the intellectual property rights and the valuation of Chinese currency between the United States and China, e.g., <http://finance.sina.com.cn>, accessed on July 11, 2005; and <http://www.xinhuanet.com>, accessed on July 11, 2005.

interests and other industries. In the final analysis, the resolution to the 2005 Sino-U.S. trade dispute reflects the unequal standings of China and the United States in the global political economy. Power, be it political or economic, has factored into the U.S.-China garment trade, which connects the Chinese producers and the U.S. consumers and ultimately the Chinese and U.S. clothing industries (or the two fields).

6.6 GLOBAL NETWORKS OF CHINESE MADE CLOTHING: CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS

The export of China-made garments to the United States clearly provides a material connection between people (eventually the consumers) in the United States with the Chinese suppliers and workers, just as my Steelers' jersey connects me, through Mr. Zeng, to some garment factory and its workers in China. I, as a U.S. consumer, and the Chinese garment workers are connected to a network that is formed through the movement of the garment. But this material connection does not mean that the meanings of the garments that are transpired at the sites of consumption and production are the same. In fact, the meanings of the garments for the Chinese producers are disconnected from the meanings of those garments for the U.S. consumers. To illustrate this point, I will provide a vignette of mine that describes my use of the Steelers' jersey and some examples of the Chinese garment workers.

As newly converted fans of the Steelers, my wife and I decided to go to a sports bar to watch the Super Bowl XL game, which was held in Detroit, Michigan on February 5, 2006. Right after lunch, we headed out for a bar, and I was of course wearing my Steelers' jersey sent to me by my friend from Shanghai. After a few failed attempts (because the seats were fully

booked), we luckily located a table without reservation in a sports restaurant/bar at the Waterfront, a booming area for shopping and recreation in Pittsburgh. We killed some time over snacks and drinks (the game was scheduled to begin in the evening), just as many people did in the restaurant. By people, I meant the Steelers fanatics: They were all decked out in black and gold jerseys, some were holding the Steelers' "Terrible Towels," and some even brought out their favorite stuffed animals dressed in Steelers' jerseys. Finally, the game began and we watched the game over dinner and drinks on a large flat-screen TV. Each time the Steelers scored or made a big play, we cheered, "go Steelers, go!" But when the Seahawks, the Steelers' opponent, were about to make a big play, we booed them even though they were only on TV. By cheering for the Steelers and booing the Seahawks, a sense of familiarity and togetherness, or to use an anthropological term made popular by Victor Turner, "communitas," was developed among the audience in the restaurant (1969: 97). Total strangers became very friendly and were not awkward at all about striking up a conversation with each other during the commercial breaks. My Steelers' jersey clearly helped to mark me as "one of us": When the Steelers scored a touchdown, one guy whom I had never met before came over and gave me a high five to celebrate. Yes, we had a good reason to celebrate: the Steelers won Super Bowl XL.

Reflecting on my experience of the Super Bowl game, my Steelers' jersey clearly mattered, not because it was made in China, but because of the black and gold and the Steelers' logo on it. It signaled that I was "one of us." Should I have worn a Seahawks' jersey, no matter where it was made, my experience in the restaurant/bar would be conceivably very different. This brings out the point that the context in which I wear the shirt and the symbolic meanings of the shirt are separate from its place of origin or production. Indeed, the symbolic contents of the shirt including the "black and gold," the Steelers' and the NFL logo, and the Reebok brand all

belong to organizations located in the United States. Reebok is the OBM manufacturer, while the Chinese supplier that makes the shirt is the OEM manufacturer who is only responsible for the production of the shirt. But that does not mean the Steelers' shirt is meaningless to the Chinese workers who made it; it only suggests that what the shirt means to them is different from what it means to me in the sports bar watching a Steelers' game.

To say that the NFL garments provide a means of survival and empowerment for the Chinese workers who made them is not really an exaggeration. The majority of Chinese garment workers are migrant workers from China's vast countryside where opportunities are sparse for non-agricultural jobs and at the same time working in small family farms allotted by the government is not sufficient to make a living. By contrast, working in the garment factories, though not exactly high-paying jobs with good working conditions, the migrant workers (mostly young girls) can live off of their work and frequently feel empowered while being exploited. Sociologist Ching Kwan Lee records many examples of migrant workers in Shenzhen that illustrate this point (Lee 1998). Among Lee's research subjects, Chi-Ying is a young woman from Hubei province. The money Chi-Ying makes, although several times what her father earns at home, was not her primary reason for leaving home. Her work in the factory, which is far away from home, allowed her to break an engagement that her parents arranged for her and to repay the gifts from the young man. Moreover, the experience of living in the city and the ability to consume modern commodities empowered her in a way that her mother and grandmother never experienced.⁸⁰ As Lee describes, Chi-Ying felt that her horizon was expanded tremendously from those of her mother and grandmother who never left the village or saw a paved road.

⁸⁰ Mary Beth Mills (2001) also sees similar patterns of empowerment among rural workers in Thailand.

During my research in Zhejiang province in 2004, I learned about a phenomenon of young migrant workers “traveling while working” (*liuyou dagong*); they would work in one city for a year or two and then move onto the next city to look for work. One worker from a garment factory I visited in Zhejiang, who was originally from the countryside of Anhui, had traveled half of China from the north to Zhejiang by engaging this type of “*liuyou dagong*,” and he planned to travel further to the south after working in Zhejiang. Like Chi-Ying, these “traveler-workers” were able to use the flexible nature of their work and the low status of “migrant workers” to their advantage. This of course does not mean that these workers are so empowered that they are free from exploitation at work. On the contrary, sweatshop conditions, such as long working hours, low pay or back pay, unsafe and/or unclean working conditions, have plagued the garment industry both in the developing countries such as China and even the developed countries including the United Kingdom and the United States (e.g., Phizacklea 1990; Bao 2001; Su 1997; Chan 2001; Lee 1998). But the point I am trying to make here is that although making the export-oriented garments contributes to the exploitation of the Chinese migrant workers, it also provides them the opportunity to make a living and achieve empowerment they probably would not be able to otherwise.

From a means of survival and empowerment to a symbol of loyalty to a football team, my Steelers’ jersey clearly means different things for the Chinese garment workers and for the U.S. consumers like me. In other words, the meanings of the Chinese made garments are transpired locally at the site of production and the site of consumption; they do not flow from one site to the other, following the movement of the goods from China to the United States. The disconnection of the meanings associated with the garments at different sites, however, does not undermine the strong connection established through the movement of the garments, which in economic terms

forms the “supply chains” of the U.S. based corporate buyers (often the OBM). The fact that those garments made in China are able to cross the borders and enter the U.S. market in a timely and efficient manner indicates the concerted efforts of the major parties involved this supply chain network. The strong control of the U.S. OBMs over their supply chains and their OEM suppliers in China is in fact the reason why the meanings of the garments constructed at the sites of production in China, being it empowerment or exploitation, are filtered out when the garments reach the shelves in the malls or department stores in the United States. Instead, new and intended meanings are carefully packaged and marketed to the U.S. consumers by the U.S. OBMs and retailers. Equally effective, when many U.S. corporate buyers felt the uncertainty of the U.S.-China trade environment in 2005, they quickly shifted many of their orders from China to India and South East Asia.

6.7 GLOBALIZATION: A CLOTHING PERSPECTIVE

As reviewed earlier, recent anthropological studies of the transnational flow of goods have primarily focused on those that flow from the West to the rest, such as McDonald’s and Coca-Cola. While popular views have often equated the increasing presence of Western goods in non-Western societies with Westernization or Americanization, anthropologists counter these views by pointing out that the “de-territorialization” of the Western goods must be “re-territorialized” in non-Western societies, in the sense that non-Western consumers always appropriate or integrate the Western goods into their local ways of consumption (Inda and Rosaldo 2002). James Watson and his colleagues’ study of McDonald’s in East Asia provides excellent examples of appropriation and integration of McDonald’s into the local ways of life (Watson

1997). In this respect, there is little difference between the consumption of Western goods such as McDonald's in non-Western societies and the consumption of the Chinese made garments in the United States. In both instances, the meanings of the goods at the site of production (or origination) do not automatically transfer to their site of consumption following the movement of the goods. Thus, my study of the transnational flow of the Chinese made garments joins the anthropological critique of Westernization or global homogenization thesis in the study of globalization.

However, there is more to the global connection established through the movement of clothing, in this case, clothing made in China and consumed in the United States. It ties the Chinese producers and the U.S. corporate buyers into a network of supply chains in which the U.S. corporate buyers enjoy primary control. Furthermore, the Chinese made garments also link the supply chain network to a broader network composed of not just the Chinese producers and the U.S. corporate buyers, but also the U.S.-based textile and garment manufacturers, their workers, and the U.S. consumers. This global network, or more precisely the "network of networks," constituted through the movement of the Chinese made garments is critical to further our understanding of globalization in two ways.

For one, it connects various persons and groups both in China and the United States, and because of that the interested persons and groups become each other's context when they act on their own interests and/or react to others who are also linked to the network. The global network formed by Chinese made garments works in the same way that Coca-Cola connects the company's executives in the United States and the consumers like Elizabeth Solomon in Papua New Guinea studied by Foster (2002). As a result of the connection, the two parties become each other's context to construct their own meanings of the commodity which guide their

actions. The point that the network provides the context for action is especially evident during the U.S.-China textile and apparel trade dispute in 2005.

The U.S.-based textile and apparel manufacturers' and workers' interests clashed with those of the U.S. corporate buyers on the issue of more or less garment imports from China. Subsequently, they each constructed their "meanings" of the Chinese made garments from the vantage point of their own positions and interests: while the U.S.-based manufacturers and workers perceived those commodities as a "flood" and "threat," the U.S. corporate buyers saw them as "quality products with cheap prices." Each side lobbied hard and tried to convince the U.S. policy makers of their version of the meanings of the Chinese made garments. The Chinese producers, on their part, also tried to do whatever they could to preserve their interest and the meaning they mapped onto the products—a means of livelihood. Many cried out to the Chinese government for help, more acted, to be more exact, reacted on their own. For fear of heavy losses, many Chinese manufacturers were afraid to take new orders from the United States during the prolonged negotiation period between the U.S. and Chinese governments. For those who did, they tried to beat others at the "finish line," that is, trying to get their products to the U.S. Customs before others and before the quota limits were filled. To do so, many of them did the otherwise unimaginable: shipping their "cheap" products in the safeguarded categories by air instead of by sea, which resulted in steep climb of costs (Nanfang Daily, 07/04/05).

The connections between the actions of the interested parties such as the U.S.-based manufacturers and workers, the U.S. corporate buyers, and the Chinese producers are what I call the "network effect": those who are connected to the network act by reacting to others who are also connected to the network, which creates an effect of chain reactions throughout the network. Thus, although various interested parties connected to the network construct their meanings of

the goods from their own positions, which results in a disconnection between meanings of the goods at different sites, these disconnected meanings *are connected* in the sense that they become each other's context in which those who hold one meaning act by reacting to the others who hold a different meaning. In this sense, what we can learn from the global network of the Chinese made garments is not just that the meanings of the goods are always constructed "locally" at different sites, but also that the various "local" meanings are connected into a global network, here the network constituted through the movement of the Chinese made garments. Differently put, this global network becomes the mechanism that perpetuates "local" heterogeneity of meanings of the goods.

For another, we can further understand globalization by examining the way in which power is vested in the global network of the Chinese made garments. Clearly, power is not evenly distributed in this network. As a whole, the United States has more power over China, as reflected in the unfair trade regimes. This of course is not a novel point (e.g., Krishna and Tan 1998). What is more nuanced is the way in which power is embodied and manifested through the global network of the Chinese made garments. That is to say, power is not an abstract entity, but is vested, enacted, and channeled through the network of the garments. Once again, I use the example of the 2005 U.S.-China trade dispute to illustrate my point.

The U.S. corporate buyers had more power over the Chinese producers precisely because they could provide (as well as deny) access of the Chinese made garments to the U.S. market. Protected by international trade regimes, the U.S.-based manufacturers' and workers also have power to deny market access of the Chinese made garments. While in a position vested with less power, the Chinese producers had fewer options at their disposal to counter an unfavorable trade environment. Thus, power is unevenly vested among the interested parties that are connected to

the global network of the Chinese made garments, which is reflected by what each of them can do regarding those garments. By the same token, power is only enacted or exercised through what the various interested parties do with regard to the garments. When the U.S.-based manufacturers and workers exercised, through the U.S. government, their power to deny access of certain categories of Chinese made garments in 2005, the impact on those who were also connected to the network was uneven. U.S. corporate buyers shifted their orders from China to other Third World countries. The Chinese producers, on the other hand, faced with fewer options but greater impact. The example of 2005 U.S.-China trade dispute suggests that power in general terms circumscribes the context in which the involved persons and groups act and react.

6.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I try to explore the global connections of the Chinese clothing industry by looking at the exportation of Chinese made garments to the United States. Upon further examination, as we would expect, my China-made Steelers' jersey to me means something completely different from what it means to the Chinese workers who made it. In this way, the apparent material connection between me and the Chinese workers only translates into a disconnection between the meanings of the shirt that are constructed at different sites. This observation supports the anthropological critique of the global homogenization thesis in the study of globalization.

However, this chapter proposes a clothing perspective to the study of globalization, which goes beyond a mere rejection of the global homogenization thesis. By focusing on the

U.S.-China textile and apparel trade dispute in 2005, I suggest that the various parties involved, such as the U.S.-based manufacturers and workers, the U.S. corporate buyers, and the Chinese producers, tried to map their own versions of the meanings onto the garments from their particular vantage point. That is to say, they do not construct meanings of the garments at a whim, but do so out of their own specifically located interests. Moreover, the various interested parties are connected because they are all linked to a common network of the garments in which one acts by reacting to the others. Such a network analysis not only helps us understand how the different meanings are constructed at different sites or positions globally, but also how the differences are connected and perpetuated. This network analysis should not be only applicable to the Chinese made clothing; it has a much wider application. The broad application of this approach is eloquently illustrated by Elf Hannerz:

In a more complex situation, it becomes increasingly obvious that the individual's perspective, the individual's share or version of socially organized meaning, is in large part a product of his network experience...Individuals' perspectives, then, come to consist of the conceptions which they have come to construct or appropriate for their own use, as it were, but also of their perspectives on other perspectives—their approximate mappings of other people's meanings (Hannerz 1992a: 42-3).

As illustrated by the example of the 2005 U.S.-China trade dispute, the way in which the various interested parties acted by reacting to others was exactly based on their “approximate mappings” of other parties' meanings of the Chinese made garments.

In addition to the global connectedness of the different meanings mapped onto the Chinese made clothing in different locations, I also argue that the various interested persons and

groups are not connected to the network in the same way. Because of their particular locations (or positions) in the network, some are vested with more power than others. The specific power of providing or denying access to the U.S. market, places those interested parties who reside in the United States in a more advantageous position than those involved parties in China. Because of the unevenness of power between the U.S. OBM buyers and the Chinese OEM producers, the meanings of the garments in their place of origin are filtered out, and new meanings are created and marketed in their place of consumption. Furthermore, because of unevenness of power in the global network of the Chinese made garments, those involved parties in China have fewer options than others in the United States to act and react to any disturbances in the network. On that note, I conclude this chapter with the story of Mr. Zeng in 2005.

Mr. Zeng, the friend who sent me the Steelers' jersey, shipped the order of the NFL jerseys when the quota of that category was over 90 percent filled, and he was worried sick and prayed for ten days that his shipment would not be rejected by U.S. Customs. Mr. Zeng's example challenges any proposition that globalization entails unfettered flows of goods across the borders of nation-states. On the contrary, it serves as a reminder that the global political economy continues to shape and condition the transnational flow of goods.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 “SOCIALIST MARKET ECONOMY WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS”

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided to reform China’s economy in 1978, it started a fundamental shift in China’s economic structure from a state-owned and state-run planned economy to one that is composed of increasing shares of privately-owned and foreign-owned elements. China’s apparel industry is particularly illustrative of this trend. Since the early 1990s, China’s apparel industry is dominated by non-state-owned sectors. Such a shift in China’s economic structure has created a paradox for the CCP: On the one hand, the CCP still insists on a Marxist ideology that asserts that the economic base determines the superstructure, a concept that every Chinese high school student can recite, and on the other hand, the Chinese economy today is no longer state-owned and the “socialist” share has shrunk to a dismal minority. How then can the CCP and the state justify within the Marxist framework that China is still a socialist economy and should maintain a socialist ideology and superstructure?

Emboldened by Deng’s comments during his famous tour to South China in the Spring of 1992 (see Chapter 2), former president Jiang Zemin came up with a solution during his speech at the 14th Party Congress in October 1992, which established that the goal for China’s economic reform was “to construct socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics.” Evidently, Jiang intended to integrate or to enforce a compromise between the Chinese economy and the

ruling ideology with the notion of a socialist market economy. Of course, not everyone agrees with Jiang's new definition of the state of the Chinese economy; for example, British political economist Shaun Breslin (2004) calls the Chinese economy "capitalism with Chinese characteristics." Be it capitalism or socialism, the introduction of market forces into the Chinese economy simultaneously changed the structure of the Chinese economy and the socialist ideology, and consequently both were endowed with "Chinese characteristics." Alternatively, one may say that it was because of the specific context of China that the market economy and the socialist ideology, both of which came from outside China, had to be adapted to the characteristics of Chinese society. Then the question arises: What are the "Chinese characteristics"?

Once again, Deng Xiaoping was the first Chinese leader who used the phrase "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in his opening address at the 12th Party Congress in 1982, but the idea of the "Chinese characteristics" was only fully developed in the then Communist Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang's speech at the 13th Party Congress in 1987, in which Zhao proclaimed that China was in the "primitive stage" (*chujī jieduan*) of a socialist society because of the "basic realities" (*jiben guoqing*) of Chinese economy, which included "a huge population, an economy with little accumulated wealth, uneven regional development, and underdeveloped means of production." According to Zhao, those characteristics of China determined that for a long time China would be in the primitive stage of socialism, and consequently China had to adapt socialism to the Chinese reality and build a socialist society with Chinese characteristics.

Therefore, in a broad sense, the political economy of modern China is a case of syncretism between Marxism and the Chinese reality, and between market mechanisms and Chinese socialism and Chinese society. In this light, the phenomenal changes that have taken

place in contemporary China are also the process in which both Marxism (or socialism) and market mechanisms become localized in the context of China and vested with “Chinese characteristics.” This dissertation engages with the question of “Chinese characteristics” from the vantage point of Chinese clothing and the clothing industry.

7.2 CLOTHING, MODERNIZATION, AND GLOBALIZATION

The central question this dissertation has been concerned with is how clothing and the clothing industry are constituted by and constitutive of the phenomenal changes that have taken place in contemporary China, especially in the post-Mao, post-1978 reform period. Among the changes, I have focused on two broad and related themes: modernization and globalization. Throughout the dissertation, I try to address two major questions: 1) Are the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry merely a part of China’s economic development or modernization? And 2) does China’s integration with the global economy translate into a Westernization of China?

Chapters 2 and 3 mainly addressed the first question, although Chapters 4 and 5 also touch on the issue of China’s efforts to modernize its fashion industry. The development of China’s textile and apparel industries, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a process of deregulation and liberalization in which the socialist state cultivates and encourages market competition in the Chinese economy. In this sense, the development of China’s textile and clothing industries is a part of the state’s agenda to increase efficiency, upgrade the industries, and more broadly to modernize the Chinese economy. However, the shift from a planned economy to a market economy does not mean a complete implementation of Western style free market in China. On the contrary, the emergent Chinese market economy has “Chinese characteristics,” one of which

is that the Chinese state is not a democracy and the state remains the sole guardian of the operation of the market. As a result, the power of the state can penetrate the market at will. Moreover, the state also attempts to vest meanings in the changes taking place in China's clothing industry, which is apparent in the state's discourse of building a modernized socialist China. In this way, the economic modernization in China is not intended to be an imitation of the West, but a means to an end. Similarly, the Chinese notion of modernity, which is reflected in the official narratives of the evolution of clothing styles in contemporary China (Chapter 3), is not modeled after the West; instead, it is a story the Chinese tell themselves about themselves (cf. Geertz 1973: 448) in relation to their own past (cf. Rofel 1999). Therefore, modernization and modernity as reflected by the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry are vested with Chinese meanings, and hence Chinese characteristics.

Intertwined with the issues of modernization and modernity, this dissertation also examines the ways in which Western styles of clothing, Western design techniques and business models, and Western forms of fashion shows and fashion weeks become localized in China. In various chapters, I argue that Western styles of clothing are rendered modern Chinese clothing (Chapter 3), Western design techniques and business models are adapted to the Chinese market (Chapter 4), and Western forms of fashion shows and fashion weeks contain subtle cultural logics that have to be understood in the context of China and its fashion industry (Chapter 5). Therefore, the opening up of China and the huge inflow of Western goods, practices, and institutions do not automatically translate into a Westernization of China or homogenization of the world. On the contrary, things global (indeed Western), such as Western styles of clothing, business models, and fashion shows, are "re-territorialized" in China and endowed with Chinese meanings. This study of China's clothing and fashion industry thus challenges global

homogenization or Westernization thesis that permeates the popular imagination of the so called “global pop culture.” In this respect, I find previous anthropological studies on foods very insightful (e.g., Watson 1997; Miller 1998b).

In addition, this dissertation has also explored the “global connectedness” or integration of China’s clothing industry with the global clothing industry through the examination of the exportation of China-made garments to the United States (Chapter 6). As a significant part of the development of China’s clothing industry, China has since the early 1990s become the largest exporter of garments in the world. China today is also the largest supplier of garments for the U.S. clothing industry. As such, Chinese made garments connect Chinese manufacturers (OEMs) that are responsible for the production of the garments to U.S. apparel companies (OBMs) that control the brands, the designs, and the marketing. This particular pattern of the global connection between the Chinese OEM manufacturers and the U.S. OBM buyers not only reflects an international division of labor, but also a global inequality of power. It explains on the one hand why the meanings of the garments do not move across the borders, and on the other hand why the inequality between the Chinese suppliers and the U.S. buyers is perpetuated. Therefore, this dissertation offers a clothing perspective on globalization that examines both meanings and power that are vested in clothing, which leads to another argument that I tried to make.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that clothing is not just a business, but a business that involves cultural logics, and that it is not just economics, but also is endowed with meanings. Because clothing and fashion lie at the intersection of the fields of culture and economy, I argue that a cultural economic approach is needed to understand the internal dynamics of the Chinese field of clothing and fashion. Moreover, by adopting a cultural

economic approach, the dissertation is informed by the insights from both interpretive anthropology and political economy.

7.3 SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

Although I have tried to present this dissertation in a planned out and orderly fashion, the conception of the project, the field research, and the writing in some ways each took a life of their own. At the stage of conception of the project, I was initially interested in the changes in Chinese clothing styles, particularly in the sharp contrast between the nearly ubiquitous uni-sex Mao suit in the radical socialist period and the diverse styles for both men and women today. My major concerns included how the Chinese state as well as the Chinese people reconciled the socialist egalitarian ideals and the diverse clothing styles today, which clearly indicated differences along class and gender lines, and how—if at all—the tensions between the two were played out. Once I arrived in Shanghai in 2004, I conversed with professors at Donghua University about my ideas, but they appeared to have no interest in ideology. Worse yet, I got a strong sense that they were wary of me asking them those questions. Their assumption was, as I interpreted them, that I was Chinese and I should know all the answers myself. In a strange way (maybe not so strange), my advantage of being a cultural insider worked against me in this instance.⁸¹

⁸¹ Being a cultural insider worked against me in this particular instance because the “naïve” questions that I asked were assumed to be known to me. But overall, being a cultural insider facilitated my research in significant ways. For example, I was able to get to know a large number of people in the clothing industry quickly utilizing my existing networks through friends, former classmates, and hometown fellows, etc.

While I was still researching archival materials at Donghua University, I started to look for contacts in the clothing and fashion business. Through friends, I met with a few trade agents working in the business of international garment trade. Perhaps because of my friends or perhaps because they thought I could be a potential business partner in the United States, they were very friendly and open with me with regard to their “trade secrets.” I followed them to their meetings with clients and to the factories that produced the garments for them. Through them I learned for the first time how a pair of jeans was made from a piece of fabric through the complex processes of cutting, assembling, sandblasting, stonewashing, ironing, and packaging. The assembly line gave me a strong impression that a piece of garment required concerted efforts from lots of people and through many processes. I began to think of the clothing industry as a whole in which all the players involved were connected, though they might have different roles.

This sense of connectedness was not only found in the export sector, but also the domestic sector. Through the contacts I established in 2002, I was also able to conduct one month of participant observation in a fashion company in Shanghai. There (as well as in other companies I visited later), I observed that the designers’ office was the nexus of all the activities and operations taking place in the company. People from various departments constantly came in and out of the designers’ office, asking questions to ensure the right fabric, the right stitching, the correct button, and the best image to be put up in the store, and so on. Later in the year, when I went to Shanghai Fashion Week and China Fashion Week, the connectedness within the industry became even more evident during those events, because they were the converging points of the various agents in the industry, including fashion designers, models, journalists, photographers, buyers, consumers (usually VIP customers or interested consumers), corporate sponsors, and officials of the organizations in the industry and even local government officials.

It was because of the strong sense of the “connectedness” of the industry that I was compelled to learn each piece of the puzzle (I also felt that one year of funded research was a rare opportunity in my professional career and that I should use it to learn as much as I could about the industry), and subsequently I interviewed a wide range of individuals in the industry during my field research, instead of focusing more narrowly on one particular group or one particular aspect of clothing and the clothing industry.

After I came back from the field, I started to reevaluate my original research plan and seriously consider ways to integrate my initial interest in change and conveying a sense of “connectedness” of the Chinese clothing and fashion industry. I came to the realization that the clothing industry is also “connected” to (in fact embedded in) the broad changes taking place in China. The thinking and writing process also forced me to bring together my knowledge of Chinese clothing and the clothing industry with my theoretical concerns in anthropology, particularly regarding the ways to incorporate the insights of both interpretive anthropology and political economy (e.g. Schneider 1994; Comaroff 1997; Bestor 2001), two important traditions in anthropology that tend to go in different directions (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

After long periods of deliberation, writing, and revising, I came up with this dissertation which takes an unconventional anthropological approach—a cultural economic approach—to examine an unconventional anthropological subject—Chinese clothing and the clothing industry, which I consider a field in itself (per Bourdieu 1993). However, I believe that my central concern of how Chinese clothing and the clothing industry are constituted by and constitutive of the remarkable changes that have taken place in contemporary China is of profound importance in the anthropology of China. As the main subject of my research, Chinese clothing and the

clothing industry are at the intersection of culture and economy, of the local and the global, and thus serve as a perfect site to engage a wide range of issues and theoretical debates.

While this dissertation has focused on the interconnections of clothing and the clothing industry as a field and the relationship between the changes in clothing and the clothing industry and the broad processes of modernization and globalization, it leaves unanswered many questions about particular groups of people located in specific positions in the field of China's clothing industry. For example, intensive ethnographic research on the garment workers would address questions about how the structural changes in China's textile and apparel industries impacted the lives of the workers. Chapter 2 noted that over one million Chinese textile and garment workers lost their jobs during the restructuring of the state-owned enterprises in the late 1990s. In fact, that was only part of the story. Because of China's dual "household registration system" (*hukou*), workers with urban residence registration (*chengshi hukou*) were better protected by the state than workers with rural residence registration (*nongcun hukou*). Thus, future research on Chinese garment workers should examine not just the relationship between labor and management, between workers and the state, but also the distinctions among the workers themselves and the uneven impact on them due to the changes in Chinese clothing and the clothing industry.⁸² Future research can also exclusively focus on the Chinese consumers and examine the ways through which clothing is related to the issues of class and social stratification (Davis 2000; Goodman 1999).

Aside from locally focused research, future research can further expand the network analysis explored in Chapter 6 and examine the global connections and/or disconnections of the

⁸² Workers with rural residence registration can work in urban areas, but they are considered migrant workers. In addition, there are other factors than household registration that differentiate workers. For example, gender is also an important dimension in the lives of the workers.

network resulted from the transnational movement of clothing, which is also called by some scholars the global commodity chains (e.g. Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986; Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Bestor 2001). The global commodity chains are useful tools to study how the meanings of commodities are locally constructed and at the same time how political economy shapes and conditions the commodity chains.

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