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Four Myths of Fashion:

An Ethnographic Research on the Fashion Media Industry in Hong Kong and Mainland China

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Abstract

Fashion meanings are constantly shifting as they interact with specific sociohistorical, economic and cultural situations, and its specific manifestations in Asia deserves further scholarly exploration. This ethnographic research explains how today's fashion media represent fashion in synchrony with the cycles of ever-changing Western and global fashion. I take readers on a journey of remapping the conflicting notions of fashion. In the course of participant observation at a Chinese fashion magazine and interviews with over thirty fashion industry personnel in Hong Kong and mainland China, four myths of fashion are discerned on the *personal*, *organisational*, *industry* and *national* levels. Sequentially, each level correspond to each myth, and each myth involves two specific pairs of conflicting or even paradoxical imaginaries of fashion. They become the readers' critical spectacles to look through the constraining and enabling nature of fashion in a real social setting in the Asian context.

Keywords: cultural studies, fashion magazine, Hong Kong, media and communication, participant observation, sociology of fashion

Since the early twentieth century, communications technology has been abruptly and rapidly developing. The mass media that disseminates and receives information has already evolved through several genera-tions in the past century, with telegrams giving way to the telephone, radio, cinema, television and now the global internet, and it is still changing quickly. In disseminating messages, various media influence the direction, speed and process of political, economic, academic and cultural developments in a complex way. Today, diverse online and offline media supply an endless flow of messages daily. Among them are fashion messages. More and more images and text linked with the idea of fashion are being received and seen. Fashion marketers create and recycle a vast array of cultural signs and spectacles in their advertising and branding, using videos, promotional materials, spatial designs and even architecture. They attempt to connect and even fuse fashion with art, culture and also history, permeating society. Abstract and ambiguous meanings are often encoded in the text and visuals of fashion communications, often making them difficult to analyse and interpret systematically. Beyond that, in today's globalised world, people on every continent are to some extent impacted by such fashion communications. The meanings they comprehend may be very different, and they certainly are not static. Meanings are constantly shifting as they interact with the specific social, historical, economic and cultural situations. The significance of these transformations deserves further scholarly exploration applying media, cultural and communication theories, linguistics, semiotics, marketing, sociology, psychology and

perhaps even philosophical inquiry. The objective should be to explain how today's fashion media represent fashion in text and visuals in synchrony with the cycles of ever-changing Western and global fashion. How do they generate an exclusive sense of fashion in the local context?

Borrowing Renè Magritte's famed caption "this is not a pipe", the rephrased title of my ethnographic research *This Is Not an LV Bag: The Simulacra of Fashion in and beyond the Media Business in Hong Kong and Mainland China* (Tse 2013) is not a sheer reproach of the consumerist sovereignty of a renowned international fashion empire. Instead, the line epitomises a diverse, deepened and interdisciplinary exploration of fashion, that prevents us from perceiving our world as a "seamless web of oppression" (Baudrillard 1994; Wilson 2007, 19) or interpreting fashion as solely a luxurious, superfluous commodity. Though fashion is a significant global creative industry, and it plays an important role in the realms of art, history, philosophy and cultural studies, fashion is still often regarded as wasteful, deceptive and even debauched. These popular simulacra of fashion are exactly what this study wants to reassess and de-simulate——to remap the relationships among the conflicting notions of fashion in different disciplines in a coherent manner, determining which of the myriad of Western and Asian fashion theories, be they critical or reassuring, are applicable to the contemporary fashion industry in a specific space and time, and how so. The social construction of fashion was assumed, but this assumption was verified in the course of the study. The intuition was that in a modern capitalist society both the constraining and enabling nature of fashion are operative and that this can be substantiated in a realistic social setting.

My research investigated the role of the print media in reporting local and worldwide fashion news in Hong Kong. It addressed how the media present luxury brands as fashionable through linguistic and non-linguistic means disseminated both online and in more traditional media; how they improvise the ideas of fashion at the outset; how they adapt, negotiate and twist the meanings of fashion generated by brand managers, photographers, stylists and others;

and how editors, copywriters, graphic designers, advertising sales managers and in-house photographers adapt and twist those meanings. An empirical study of those processes was designed to illuminate which fashion theories are applied in Hong Kong's fashion industry and the hidden mechanisms involved. "The deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a 'special case of what is possible'" (Bourdieu 1993, 2). My study did not aim at elucidating a model of universal validity, but it attempted to represent a model potentially applicable to similar social settings, especially across the Asia-Pacific region.

As James Clifford has argued, "Ethnographic truths are……inherently partial……once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact" (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 7). Rather than occupying an omnipotent position in creating new fashion knowledge, or claiming to be able to interpret every single observed incident in fashion media or Asian fashion culture exhaustively and objectively—even the "insiders" do not know completely about their "field"—my two-year ethnographic research in Hong Kong and Chinese fashion media industry attempted to rearrange and connect existing conceptions of fashion to the Asian cultural texts I produced, which are historically determined by the moment of my encounter (as an ethnographer) with whomever I am studying. The encoding and negotiation of fashionability in and through Asian fashion media (in relation to the Euro-American fashion [culture] industry) from the 1980s to 2010s were thus reviewed, recorded and reinterpreted. Rather than explaining everything, I mainly raised key questions and insights for people to think and explore further.

At the beginning of my research paper (Tse 2013), I took the readers on a journey of theorising fashion in its popular conceptions, academic definitions and their associated meanings—from an observable, physical and individual object to a spiritual concept; from a static aesthetic benchmark to a dynamic expression of creativity; as a means of segregating members of

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the community of fashion from non-members; as a mode of communication more versatile, complex and affective than normal organised, cultured language; as a tool capitalists can use to shape mass consciousness and consumers' orientation; as a tactic aggravating social inequality, unequal distribution of resources, and various forms of discrimination and antagonism; as irrational; as a superficial, feminine, stupid game; as a contagious invasion of Western capitalist and consumerist culture, distracting people from other more fruitful ambitions; as a dazzling distraction; as pseudo-academic discipline; as a fundamentally contradictory display of desire; as art, culture or craftsmanship with its own symbolism and values; as a constantly morphing camouflage; as beyond the scope of utilitarianism; as a half-known vocabulary, ambivalent and monotone; as an industry meticulously controlled by only a few; as a mass entertainment in which all members of the general public can partake; as a shield against aging and mortality; as shock and anesthesia amid the rapid social changes of urban life; as a splendid gown of equality, autonomy and democracy, enabling one to transcend his or her socioeconomic position; as a spectrum of interpretation and expression in the hands of consumers; as a bizarrely complex and uncontrollable mode of communication—ostensibly foreseeable but in fact recycling and fluctuating; as merely a game of the privileged rich; as sexual suppression and/or titillation; as a manifestation of the unspeakable, semiotic affect; as an emblem of the larger-than-life zeitgeist of an era, amplifying imagery and trivialising physical sensation; as a blank sheet signifier anyone can fill in. These conflicting and scattered ideas were put into a more organised manner, among which the two major schools of fashion theories emerged: the Critical perspective versus the Pluralist perspective; within each broad camp there are also different dynamics in criticising fashion or interpreting its specific meanings. On the one hand, Marx (1967), Veblen (2012), Adorno (1986), Baudrillard (2007), Barthes (1990), Bourdieu (1984) and Negrin (2010) criticised fashion's arbitrary, contradictory, illusive and irrational nature from their diverse viewpoints; Fiske (1990), Wilson (1985), Jobling (1999), Barnard (1996, 2007), Hall (2012),

Lipovetsky (1994), Evans (2003) and Skov (2005, 2012), on the other hand, stressed how fashion involves multiple twists in its meanings in the encoding and decoding process linking the creator, the mediator and the user. They became the readers' critical spectacles to look through the intricate theorisation and simulacra of fashion in the real social discourses of fashion in the Asian context.

In 2011, I started conducting an empirical study of fashion media personnel's production and negotiation of fashion meanings in order to examine whether the Critical or Pluralist School of fashion theories is more applicable in the real social setting. Through three local fashion editors with whom I am personally acquainted, an opportunity for participant observation at a Chinese magazine *Stylistic* (false name) arose in mid-2011. As a high-end fashion magazine published across greater China, *Stylistic* turned out to be a publication displaying the traits of both global monthly fashion titles and local weekly fashion magazines. My study focused on observing the staff of *Stylistic*, and to a lesser extent other fashion industry personnel in greater China. The editorial work was observed in detail by attending editorial meetings and daily activities such as photo shooting sessions and press events. I also contributed to writing one editorial feature during the study period. The level and duration of the participation were considered sufficient to elucidate how the magazine's personnel collaborate, dispute and negotiate. The observations were recorded in written notes, and photos were also taken where acceptable and appropriate. Data analysis involved complete rereading, extensive rewriting and thematic classification (Appendix 1) during the observation period and afterward (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002).

In the course of participant observation and interviews (Appendix 3) with over thirty Hong Kong and Chinese fashion media personnel (Appendix 2) including the editors, copywriters, ad sales managers, graphic designers and photographers of nine publications; fashion bloggers and marketing personnel from global fashion conglomerates from across the Asia-Pacific region, via personal networks as well as snowball sampling, four myths of fashion were gradually discerned on the *personal*, *organizational*, *industry* and

Figure 1. The Matrix of Four Fashion Myths
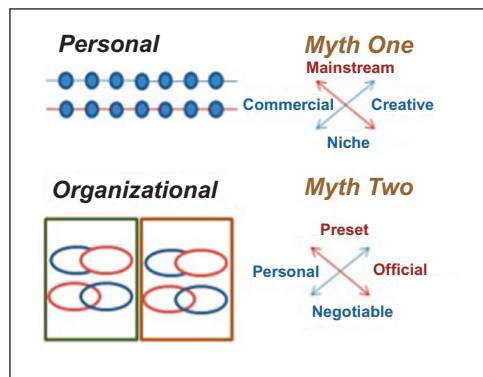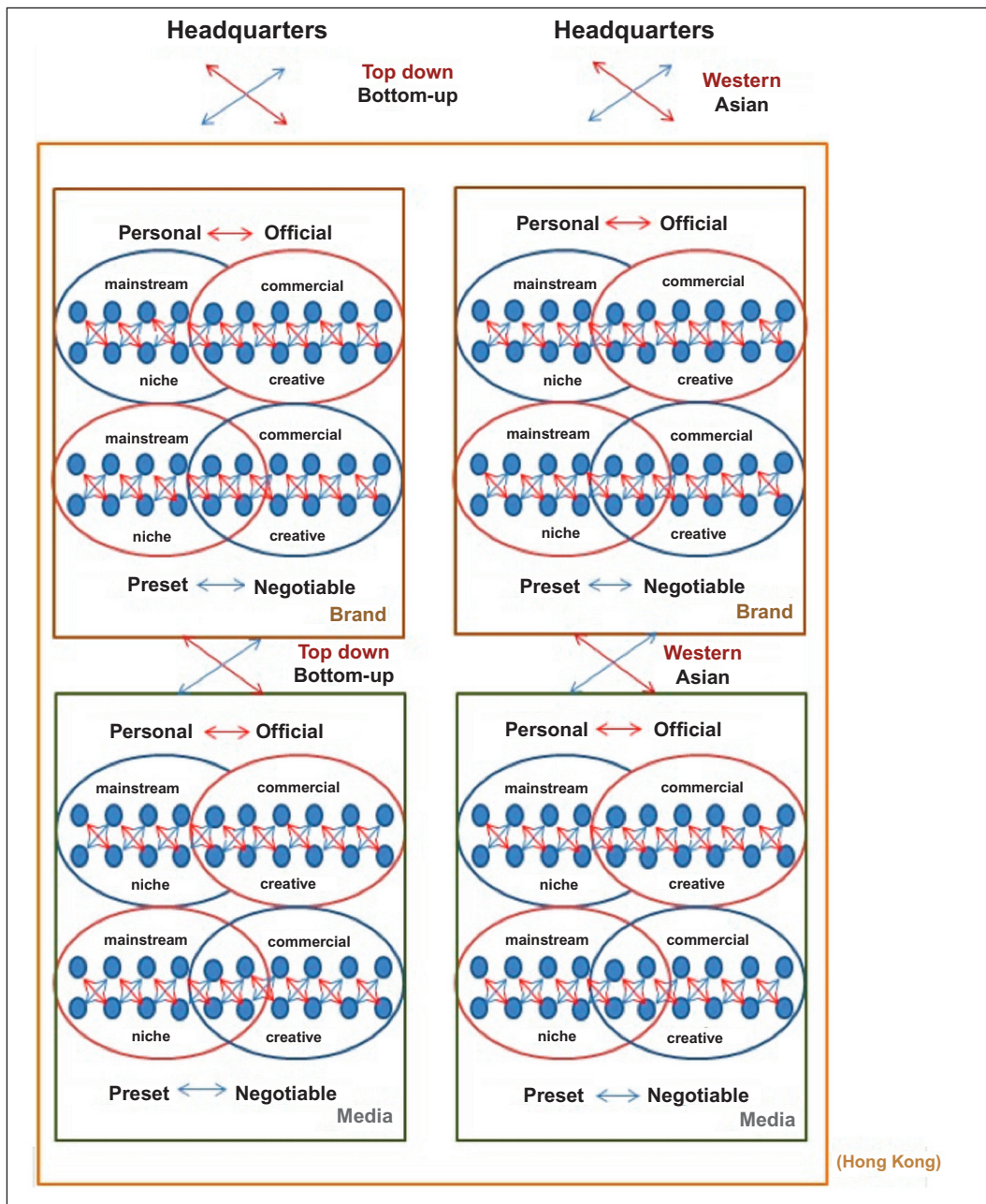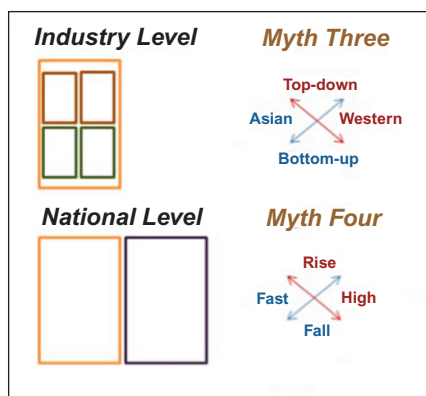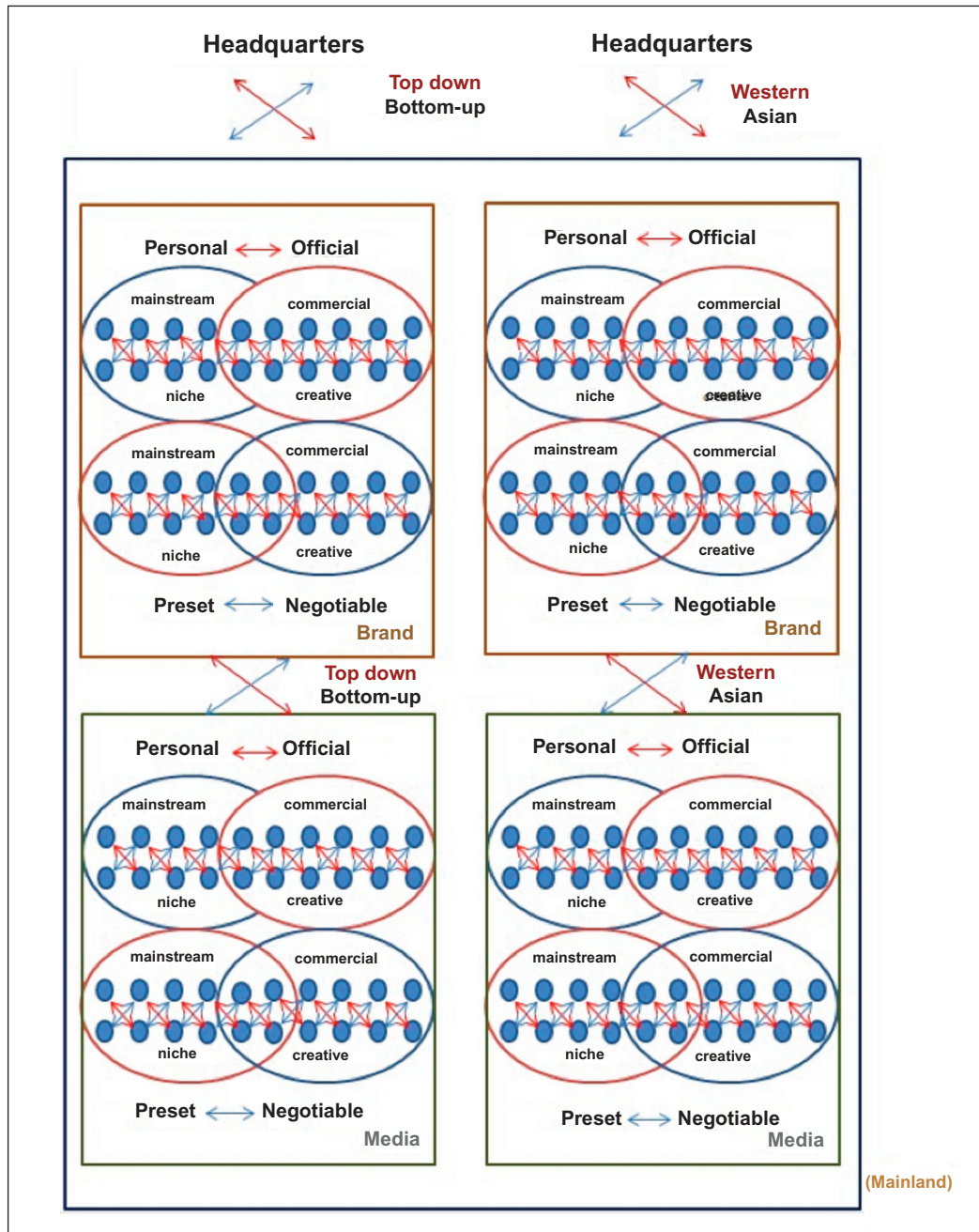
national levels discussed in four different chapters (Figure 1). Sequentially, each chapter corresponds to each myth. Each myth involved two specific pairs of conflicting or even paradoxical imaginaries of fashion, as they resonated with the fashion theories (Tse 2013).

Myth One: Mainstream or Niche? Commercial or Creative?

In the realistic local media organisation setting, it was observed that fashion spoke through clashing masks of the fashion media staffers who regarded fashion as an aesthetic and creative domain in the first place, yet presented it in a kitsch and rigid way (Tse 2015). On the broader level of political economy, the Critical perspective is valid in explaining some of the characteristics of how those media personnel manifest fashion in the local setting. They adopted a range of random, illogical notions of fashion as if they were normal. In various cases, the fashionability of fashion items was positively correlated to their monetary values, the scale and financial status of their affiliated fashion companies, and the amount of advertising dollars spent on them. Items not normally considered fashionable became fashionable in the right season, sometimes they could even replace editorial topics normally considered as fashionable. It seemed that the fashion readers could hardly escape from the matrix of deception constructed by the fashion media—a member of the mechanical culture industry that produced standardised, vulgar taste and style (Veblen 2012). Nonetheless, the Pluralist perspective also helped illustrate the other nuanced dimensions of encoding fashion—aesthetic, cultural, historical and social aspects. For example, based on the observed phenomena in our contemporary Asian and global fashion media industry, Jobling's illustrated power of iconic fashion was sounder than Barthes' theorised power of written clothing (Jobling 1999). While noticing the more dominant capitalist consideration in the encoding process in the case of *Stylistic*, I also recognised other creative possibilities as well as non-economic constraints in defining fashionability. Meanings were generated and adopted for various goals—for the sake of art and aesthetic expression as Wilson (1985) advocated, for position-taking as

Bourdieu (1984) asserted, and for defending a cultural, ethnic or ethical superiority as Simmel (2004) described. Fashion meanings were encoded and decoded in a non-linear, complicated, asymmetric and diverse way. On the one hand, in a local fashion media organisation, the media personnel were in general not very influential in encoding fashionability. They were affected by the "mainstream" notions of fashion promoted by the significant global fashion brands, tended to apply such logic instinctually while at work, thus presented the self-contradictory meanings of fashion at different times. On the other hand, the commonly perceived idea of mainstream fashion is in fact not that simplistic. It would be problematic to take the term as a synonym of "anti-creativity" and "unfashionable". Celebrity fashion designers working as the creative head of the major fashion companies, like Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton and Phoebe Philo at Céline, can be taken as counter examples. They are pushing their affiliated brands to embrace alternative, non-mainstream or even edgy styles, yet such designs are often promoted by the fashion brands feverishly. This further complicates the relationships between the mainstream and non-mainstream fashion style in the real world, and contextualises both the economic and cultural elements in the creative process.

Myth Two: Official or Personal? Preset or Negotiable?

The observed Hong Kong high fashion magazine, *Stylistic*, aimed at encoding authentic, exclusive meanings of luxury fashion in its publication. However, via the encoding process, fashion meanings were persistently negotiated in and beyond the media organisation. Such internal and external negotiations not just interplayed with the commercial logic, organisational structure and culture, but also the social and cultural myths which influenced the individual media workers. In *Stylistic*'s case, the chief editor wanted to maintain a consistent fashion aesthetic, and the internal members worked together to sustain that vision. Yet their collaborations were partly in harmony and partly in tension, again due to their inconsistent understandings of fashion. The media personnel were required to handle

the power politics within and beyond the organisation. Apparently, they seemed to have a great deal of flexibility in deciding the editorial topics and expressed individualistic and mix-and-match styles, but they would mostly follow the logic of commerce and highlight potential advertisers' brands, and tended to leave Hong Kong photographers and designers with little creative control in encoding fashionability. The junior journalists were primarily concerned with diffusing their own interpretations of fashion, whereas the senior editors emphasised the advertisers' interests. At the same time, a consensual self-censorship scheme operated at *Stylistic*. Decreased editorial and creative autonomy and increased advertiser power in negotiations were observed. Through my research, I also noted that the power of global fashion marketers superseded that of the Asian marketers. The rise of the fashion businesses in mainland China seemed to give fashion marketers more control of editorial content in their media pitching. Most international fashion enterprises tightly controlled the dissemination of their messages to the Asian media even though the Asia-Pacific region and greater China became prominent markets for such firms in recent years. Overall, the *Stylistic* journalists felt that their editorial freedom were less than at international fashion titles often regarded as significant influencers of global fashion trends (Tse 2013, 2014).

As Jobling (1999) proposed, fashion meanings were not explicitly pre-determined, but conveyed in an implicit and sublimal way—the "this is fashionable" and "this is not fashionable" rhetoric was not clearly uttered in the actual media business environment. The inconsistently presented fashion meanings in *Stylistic* provided the possibility for individual members to negotiate their intended fashion meanings or improvise their own opinions of look and style on a certain level. Under the hierarchical barriers and restrictions, the senior and junior fashion media personnel from different departments narrated their unknown and unheard stories of how they, as a material part of the fashion media, actually encoded fashionability amid an array of conflicts and creative collaboration. The outsiders, who were involved in communicating fashion in Asia and expressed their

aesthetic appreciation of *Stylistic*, reminded me that the observed local fashion media company was perceived to have a relatively high level of creative autonomy in determining fashion meanings. The disparate perceptions of creative autonomy in and beyond the organisation reflected different imaginaries of fashion—the insiders perceived the major Euro-American and Japanese fashion publications as the classics and disbelieved their company had the same power in encoding fashion in similar ways. The *Stylistic* outsiders, including the journalists working in other fashion media organisations, perceived the magazine as one of the local fashion media which is capable of partly twisting, partly adapting the Western notion of fashionability represented its own "*Stylistic* chic". This not only shattered the mainstream imaginary of the deified power of fashion media industry, but also demonstrated the fluid, discursive nature of fashion meanings as Barnard has theorised. For instance, most fashion magazines tend to feature a list of major global fashion labels regardless of their different styles, and simultaneously, they also strike a balance by featuring the up-and-coming brands even they are not so well-known and currently advertising in the magazine—the "*Stylistic* chic" represented in the 300-plus pages magazine is always in a pluralistic, hybridised form. The *Stylistic* media workers at once broke their own imagination of the "purely" glamorous local fashion media yet at the same time, they were still fascinated by the imaginary glittering atmosphere in the Western fashion media company. The structure, culture and negotiation within a fashion media organisation also adds to the hybridity of its encoded fashion meaning.

Myth Three: Top-down or Bottom-up? Western or Asian?

The discussion of glo-cal fashion marketing communication trajected beyond the media sector to the Asian fashion industry. I observed that the Asian fashion marketers, who were stereotyped as the "creativity killer", were involved in another round of complicated negotiation with their head offices in the communication process. Consequently, there were both chances and challenges for the Asian fashion marketers to

define the "Asian-style". While the global fashion enterprises like LVMH and Richemont allegedly supported infusing Asian/Chinese cultural values and aesthetics in their fashion meanings, the hidden politics of "glo-cal" fashion and luxury marketing communication were presented. Those Asian fashion and luxury marketers portrayed the unknown restrictions to fashion communication in their daily work beyond those splendid corporate directions and claimed creative diversity. Yet, alternative cases were again discovered. Headquarters and the regional marketing team negotiated more frequently, and in the case studies of Cartier, Chanel, Christian Dior, Fendi, Louis Vuitton and Prada, there were Asian, Chinese or Hong Kong cultural elements being accepted into fashionable offerings. These are indicative of how luxury and fashion brands interacted with both local and global fashion cultures. Some Asian marketers narrated their cases of successful negotiation with the headquarters to re-create the globally coordinated fashion messages for local promotion at different levels. In such cases, fashion messages were generated and disseminated in a non-linear process through a "glo-calised" and creolised process, giving prominence to local cultural values in emerging markets. Crucially, Hong Kong/Chinese fashion was being positively affected by the looming financial situation in the China market.

Meanwhile, the vicissitudes of fashion meanings in the broader fashion, beauty and luxury industry were also discerned too. The media organisations and other high-end fashion companies tried to defend and perpetuate their exclusive luxury status by its premium price, aestheticism, internationality and craftsmanship. However, the Swedish fast fashion enterprise H&M, as an relatively affordable and mass-produced fashion label, succeeded in crossing over with other renowned celebrities and designers, blending in luxury meanings in its products and squeezing into the crowd of luxury fashion labels once a year, also rightfully duplicating and democratising the "more aesthetic" high fashion to the mass. In the marketing process, it did not reinforce a restrictive and class-conscious fashion meaning as the high fashion did. Instead, it blurred the rigid opposition of high and low

fashion. In this, Lipovetsky's (1994) valorisation of the democratic dynamic of fashion in enabling homogeneous equality in the society was validated. Fashion was adopted by the masses to disintegrate the rigid social classes and hierarchy, rather than being controlled by the luxury fashion marketers.

Myth Four: Rise or Fall? High or Fast?

While the socioeconomic conditions presented suggested a greater power for Asian fashion industry workers in defining fashion, they held opposing views towards it. On the national level, the myth of the rise and fall of fashion media in mainland China and Hong Kong respectively, and the larger sociohistorical, political, cultural and technological contexts between the country and its city, were discussed and deconstructed. A more significant shift of fashion meanings in the past thirty years in Hong Kong and mainland China was recognised. Cases in Asia were highlighted; the development process also involved the historical and current conditions of global fashion media business, which generated and limited one's imagination and understanding of fashion. Whether Hong Kong fashion media is really decaying because of the rise of mainland China could be interpreted from different perspectives: the democratization of (street) fashion, cultural conflicts and de-sinicised sentiments, global technological change, and the perception for or against commercial fashion creativity are all relevant. At the end, the notions of the rise and fall of fashion media were not rigidly pinned and defined, but the final open discussions of how should various forms of fashion be defined nowadays and how different people make use of them in different meaningful ways were intentionally used to demystify the rise/fall dichotomy and open up further possibilities in defining fashion.

The development and subsequent transformations of fashion marketing and media business in Hong Kong/Asian context are intertwined with the social, economic, commercial and cultural discourses in the global context. I wonder even when the fashion media industry and the luxury and fashion companies explicitly show their commercial interest and orientation, it does not mean fashion is essentially deceptive

and uncreative, nor confirming that people involved in the encoding and decoding process are completely manipulated and cheated. According to participant observation, many of these fashion industry workers well understood and realised the economically exploitative facet of fashion industry in an unexpectedly clear way. Although many of these fashion industry workers themselves suffered from such exploitation, they were not stupid, ignorant nor being completely manipulated by the "Buy! Buy! Buy!" propaganda – the consumerist fashion meanings generated in the encoding process. Rather, they made use of their understanding of and proximity to fashion creators (designers, celebrities and models, stylists and photographers, etc.) as cultural capital, to sustain their privileged, distinctive positions in society. Making use of the premium press gifts, discounted designer products and extraordinary exposure to international art, cultures and lifestyles, the "vanity" described by some Hong Kong fashion journalists are used to empower themselves in life and differentiate their own virtues and potentials from the others. Significantly, they are exploited and empowered by fashion in simultaneously. They trust and mistrust the fashion meanings at once, and there is a complex mode of encoding and decoding which occurred among them concurrently, and the process keeps perpetuating in this manner. This is why I sought to highlight these *simultaneously constraining and enabling traits of fashion in the postmodern capitalist world*, which have been stably sustaining the four hidden fashion myths in the fashion industry.

In my employment of the term "postmodern", I refer to a state of mind or mode of thinking that challenges or even disrespects the authoritative high culture, comprising classical art, music, literature, dance performance, and even high fashion. "Postmodernism has no special place of origin…Its very significance is to marginalise, delimit, disseminate, and decenter the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and pre-modernist cultural inscriptions." (Silverman 1990, 1) Corresponding to its historical position, fashion can be taken as both elitist and anti-elitist forces at once. "…the invasion of 'high' art by 'popular' art is the foundational event of postmodernism."

(Weiss 1990, 161) This juncture of representation in the culture of our days, however, can become a starting point of genuine creativity and aesthetic diversity as well. As Ling (2000) suggested, there is no longer one single version of fashion offered in society. The multiple manifestations of fashion meanings advocate the breakdown of uniformity and surpass adoption of "lifestyles" by specific (privileged) social groups. It resonates with my study's emphasis on presenting the variety of symbolic packages being promoted in and beyond the fashion media, rather than merely documenting the multi-levels of negotiation.

The rise of digital interactivity and participatory culture in cyber space not only frustrates and dazzles the individuals in hyperreality, it also undermines the social discursive power of the global fashion companies and traditional mainstream media conglomerates. The mass public, the youth, the rebels and any other disadvantaged but creative ones in the society are somehow empowered in the cyber space. In the era of Web 2.0, it is possible for them to voice and disseminate their opinions and ideas, including their intuitive and autonomous notions of fashion, through their personal youtube accounts, facebook pages, microblogs and other social networking channels. Even though the mass public may not have a full control of the online platform, they can mobilise the masses to criticise and protest the global fashion companies online and even in real—the ten-thousand people's "photo-taking" protest outside the Dolce & Gabbana store in Canton Road in January 2012 as well as the pervasive criticism of Christian Dior's "The Shanghai Dreamers" 2011 advertising campaign in Shanghai validly proved this (Figure 2). While they decode the corporate-generated fashion meanings online and offline, they may also respond to or even twist the circulated fashion meanings through the internet in an alternate way—even if this were not fully autonomous. While the authorities attempt to limit fashion as an exclusive premium product for the elite, the globalised culture discourages it and instead allows new creative interpretations. If the old format of fashion is truly decaying, it is also likely that, other brand new forms of fashion are emerging and expanding in society in an unprecedented way.

Figure 2. The D&G "Phototaking" Protest & "The Shanghai Dreamers" Campaign.

If Louis Vuitton and its Monograms were still seen as the ultimate symbol of illusive and exploitative high end fashion when I first started my investigations in 2011, now one can also see the *mutable, ever-changing* nature of fashion destroying the sign. No one can wield absolute discursive power forever. Today's LV bag is no longer the same as last year's. Even the illusive meaning of luxury fashion has been strategically adopted and propagandised across the world; the desire for social differentiation and position-taking never dies. Informed by some fashion marketers as well as fashion media personnel, the once very popular Louis Vuitton bag has lost its glamour among the global audiences, especially among the mainlanders. Nobody can ensure if an LV bag would not be viewed as unfashionable as today's Alviero Martini's by the future generations. Perhaps, the gradual dislike of this iconic luxury fashion item is caused by its over popularity in the emerging markets, especially in the mainland. Taking the Dolce & Gabbana photo-taking protest as an example, fashion discourse in Hong Kong was politicised; in the case of Louis Vuitton and its monograms, its fashion discourse has also gradually evolved into a vulgar symbol of Chinese mainland consumption. In order to make luxury accessible and the most profit out of the fashion business, tycoons have stripped away all its special traits (Thomas 2007, 9). To Thomas, the omnipresent "luxury" fashion is an ultimate economic exploitation instead of social emancipation; "The idea", luxury executives explained, "was to 'democratise' luxury, to make luxury 'accessible.' It all sounded so noble…almost communist. But it wasn't. It was as capitalist as could be: the goal, plain and simple, was to make as much money as heavenly possible." (Thomas 2007, 13)

However, fashion consumers are not as stupid as the Critical perspective claimed. They do not just spend a big lump sum for the pragmatic value of fashion and luxury, but its symbolic value for differentiating themselves from other perceived inferior groups within the social space. Once these affluent consumers cannot use it as a form of cultural capital anymore, they abandon it right away. The current fad of the more authentic Chanel bag, more expensive Hermès bag or more stylish Céline bag again resonates with the Pluralist school of fashion—fashion meanings are negotiated between various encoders and decoders, associative meanings and preferred meanings are both adopted, and the "systematic" myths still continue to affect the fashion audiences at different points, in different times.

Future Research on Asian Fashion Industry & The Fifth Myth of Fashion?

My ethnographic research aimed at discerning the encoding process of fashion in Hong Kong and mainland China. The case of *Stylistic* and the interview responses from other twelve fashion journalists from nine other publications can be regarded as a substantial yet specific case of fashion manifestation in the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese contexts. To explore how other Asian fashion magazines manifest fashion meanings, future researchers can consider conducting similar fieldwork in an international fashion media company in Hong Kong, mainland China, Korea or Japan for three months with similar work duties and research objectives. Comparative fashion

ethnographies can lead to further discussion and understanding of the complexity of encoding fashionability, cultural globalisation and glocalisation, emerging (creative) labor patterns, postmodernity, social mobility and temporality, and the advanced capitalist production and consumption patterns across greater China or even the Asia-Pacific region, in comparison with the Euro-American context.

Also, this research mainly focused on the production/encoding stage of fashion in the Hong Kong and Asian media industry. One may wonder if fashion meanings are actually decoded and adopted in a conscious and meaningful way among mass fashion consumers in the reception stage. Whether the fashion consumers in general are as critical and knowledgeable as the fashion insiders when decoding the various facets of fashion representations, and how far they actually do make use such fashion meanings are not addressed in the present study; they are indeed meaningful areas to be further investigated, for instance by employing questionnaires or focus-group interviews with a representable size of selected target segments, to find out how the encoding and decoding processes are manifested in readers and consumers, where the processes might be reversed to become a process of decoding fashion magazines and encoding meanings through bodily expressions – elaborating and demystifying the *Fifth Myth of Fashion*. It is anticipated that contemporary readers and consumers will no longer passively decode the intended fashion meanings communicated by the fashion media, and within the dominant fashion discourse, they will still be able to improvise, reinterpret and negotiate fashion meanings with multiple agents in daily practices through their own habitus. Research on decoding/the reception stage of fashion will help academics who are interested in the circulation of fashion meaning within the circuit of culture to comprehend its transformation from production, representation, identification, regulation to consumption in a more comprehensive way.

Lastly, I believe this is just the starting point of further investigation of fashion culture and communication in Asia. My research provides insights and updated information for those who are interested in

the subject, to conduct research in a more informed and effective way in the future, for instance, the structure and culture of fashion media business as well as fashion marketing practices in Asia, or a real case of how fashion meanings were actually and complexly negotiated in the fashion industry.

Appendix 1
Coding Chart for the Thematic Classifications

1. Asian fashion media personnel (Personal Level):

1.1 Conception of fashion
    1.1.1   Written (textual)
    1.1.2   Iconic (graphical/visual)
    1.1.3   Physical/tangible
    1.1.4   Psychological/intangible
    1.1.5   Affiliation (with specific firm, institution, etc.)
    1.1.6   Any other association (with specific people, culture, nation, history, class, etc.)

1.2 Conception of non-fashion
    1.2.1   Written (textual)
    1.2.2   Iconic (graphical/visual)
    1.2.3   Physical/tangible
    1.2.4   Psychological/intangible
    1.2.5   Affiliations (with specific firm, institution, etc.)
    1.2.6   Any other associations (with specific people, culture, nation, history, class, etc.)

1.3 Personal qualities
    1.3.1   Interest in fashion
    1.3.2   Knowledge of fashion
    1.3.3   Experience & qualifications
    1.3.4   Appearance, lifestyle and social network
    1.3.5   Others

1.4 Self-perception at work

1.5 General insights about the fashion industry

1.6 Career aspirations

2. Asian fashion marketers (Personal Level):

2.1 Conception of fashion
    2.1.1   Written (textual)
    2.1.2   Iconic (graphical/visual)

2.1.3   Physical/tangible

2.1.4   Psychological/intangible

2.1.5   Affiliation (with specific firm, institution, etc.)

2.1.6   Any other association (with people, culture, nation, history, class, etc.)

2.2 Conception of non-fashion

2.2.1   Written (textual)

2.2.2   Iconic (graphical/visual)

2.2.3   Physical/tangible

2.2.4   Psychological/intangible

2.2.5   Affiliation (with firm, institution, etc.)

2.2.6   Any other association (with people, culture, nation, history, class, etc.)

2.3 Personal qualities

2.3.1   Interest in fashion

2.3.2   Knowledge of fashion

2.3.3   Experience & qualifications

2.3.4   Appearance, lifestyle & social network

2.3.5   Others

2.4 Self-perception at work

2.5 General insights about the fashion industry

2.6 Career aspirations

3. Stylistic (Organisational Level – Case study)

3.1 Now and then

3.2 Organisation structure and hierarchy

3.3 Organisational culture and socialisation

3.4 Work mode

3.4.1   Work time

3.4.2   Work space

3.4.3   Work nature

3.4.3.1 Copywriting/project team

3.4.3.1.1 Main book

3.4.3.1.2 Special creative

3.4.3.1.3 Other projects

3.4.3.2 Design team

3.4.3.2.1 Print

3.4.3.2.2 Online

3.4.3.3 Editorial team

3.4.3.4 Photography team

3.4.3.4.1 In-house photographers

3.4.3.4.2 Outside photographers

3.4.3.5 Sales team

3.4.4   Work prospects/promotion path

3.5 Production

3.5.1   Typical procedures

3.5.1.1 Producing the textual content

3.5.1.1.1 Research and preparation

3.5.1.1.2 Topic meeting & discussion

3.5.1.1.3 Execution

3.5.1.1.4 Revision

3.5.1.2 Producing the graphic content

3.5.1.2.1 Research and preparation

3.5.1.2.2 Topic meeting & discussion

3.5.1.2.3 Execution

3.5.1.2.3.1 Celebrity/model photography

3.5.1.2.3.2 Product photography

3.5.1.2.4 Revision

3.5.2   Collaboration/clash with internal parties

3.5.3   Collaboration/clash with external parties

3.5.4   Level of creativity

3.6 Resources

4. Fashion print media in Asia in general (Organisational Level):

4.1 Now and then

4.2 Organisational structure and hierarchy

4.3 Organisational culture and socialisation

4.4 Work mode

4.4.1   Work time

4.4.2   Work space

4.4.3   Work nature

4.4.3.1 Copywriting/project team

4.4.3.1.1 Main book

4.4.3.1.2 Special creative

4.4.3.1.3 Other projects

4.4.3.2 Design team

4.4.3.2.1 Print

4.4.3.2.2 Online

4.4.3.3 Editorial team

4.4.3.4 Photography team

4.4.3.4.1 In-house photographers

4.4.3.4.2 Outside photographers

4.4.3.5 Sales team

4.4.4   Work prospects/promotion path

4.5 Production

4.5.1   Typical procedures

4.5.1.1 Producing the textual content

4.5.1.1.1 Research and preparation

4.5.1.1.2 Topic meeting & discussion

4.5.1.1.3 Execution

4.5.1.1.4 Revision

4.5.1.2 Producing the graphical content

4.5.1.2.1 Research and preparation

4.5.1.2.2 Topic meeting & discussion

4.5.1.2.3 Execution

4.5.1.2.3.1 Celebrity/model photography

4.5.1.2.3.2 Product photography

4.5.1.2.4 Revision

4.5.2   Collaboration/clash with internal parties

4.5.3   Collaboration/clash with external parties

4.5.4   Level of creativity

4.6 Resources

5. Fashion business in Hong Kong/Asia (Industry Level)

5.1 Traits of fashion media in Hong Kong and mainland China

5.1.1   Print

5.1.1.1 Language

5.1.1.1.1 English

5.1.1.1.2 Traditional Chinese

5.1.1.1.3 Simplified Chinese

5.1.1.2 Origin

5.1.1.2.1 Local title

5.1.1.2.2 Greater China title

5.1.1.2.3 International title

5.1.1.3 Readership

5.1.1.3.1 Age

5.1.1.3.2 Class

5.1.1.3.3 Education

5.1.1.3.4 Ethnicity

5.1.1.3.5 Gender

5.1.1.3.6 Tastes & preferences

5.1.1.4 Circulation

5.1.1.5 Frequency

5.1.1.5.1 Daily

5.1.1.5.2 Weekly

5.1.1.5.3 Monthly

5.1.1.5.4 Quarterly

5.1.1.6 Content type

5.1.1.6.1 High fashion

5.1.1.6.2 Street fashion

5.1.1.6.3 News

5.1.1.6.4 General interest

5.1.1.6.5 Socialites

5.1.2   Digital

5.1.2.1 Corporate site

5.1.2.2 Individual blog

5.2 Traits of fashion marketing communication in Asia

5.2.1   Single-label brand/fashion group

5.2.1.1 High fashion

5.2.1.1.1 Menswear

5.2.1.1.2 Women swear

5.2.1.2 Street fashion

5.2.1.2.1 Menswear

5.2.1.2.2 Womenswear

5.2.1.3 Cosmetics, skincare & perfumes

5.2.1.4 Jewelry, accessories & watches

5.2.1.5 Other fashion goods

5.2.2   Multi-label brand/fashion distributor

5.3 Communication strengths and weaknesses of global firms

5.3.1   LVMH Group

5.3.2   Kering Group (ex PPR Group)

5.3.3   Richemont Group

5.3.4   Others

5.4 Communication strengths and weaknesses of Asian fashion distributors/retailers

5.4.1   Lane Crawford Joyce Group

5.4.2   Harvey Nichols Group Limited

5.4.3   I.T. Apparel Limited

5.4.4   Others

5.5   Fashion consumers

Appendix 2
Name Lists of Fashion Media Personnel

(Pseudo) Name List of Fashion Media Personnel

Agnes	Assistant Fashion & Beauty Editor at local fashion magazine
Bee Bee	Junior Copyeditor at *Stylistic*
Big Daddy	In-house Photographer at Image Factory Ltd.
Billy	Senior Sales Manager at *Stylistic*
Cammy	Junior Graphic Designer at *Stylistic*
Cello	Chief Editor at *Stylistic*
Debby	English Fashion Blogger
Fanny	Fashion Editor at local English fashion magazine
Fei Fei	Fashion Editor at *Stylistic*
Galison	Fashion Editor at local Chinese newspaper
Ginny	Senior Copyeditor at *Stylistic*
Jacky	Fashion Reporter at local weekly culture & lifestyle magazine
Jasper	Founder and Publisher of *Stylistic*
Jet	Senior Graph Designer at *Stylistic*
Jem	Japanese-to-Chinese Translator at Image Factory Ltd.
Josephine Chan	General Manager of an English newspaper
Karena	Deputy Editor-in-Chief at global fashion magazine (Beijing)
Kelly	Senior Fashion Journalist at a culture magazine (Shanghai)
Ken	Account Manager at boutique digital agency (Shanghai)
Kim	Culture & Lifestyle Reporter at *Stylistic*
Kris	Women's Fashion Reporter at *Stylistic*
Lim	In-house Photographer at Image Factory Ltd.
Mag	Graphic Designer at *Stylistic*
Maisy	Senior Fashion Journalist at online fashion website (Shanghai)
Monica	Assistant Advertising Director at *Stylistic*
Pipi	Freelance Photographer
Ringo	Men's Fashion Reporter at *Stylistic*
Shandy	PR & Advertising Director at *Stylistic*
Slim Shaddy	In-house Photographer at Image Factory Ltd.
Sporty	Managing Editor-in-Chief at *Stylistic*
Timothy	Copyeditor at *Stylistic*
Tina	Senior Editor at *Stylistic*
Tribecca	Temporary Senior Editor at *Stylistic*
Winnie	Editorial/ Copyediting Intern at *Stylistic*

Appendix 3
Interview Questions

Interview Questions used with Media Personnel

Q1: How long have you worked in the fashion media industry?

☐ Less than a year
☐ 1 – 5 years
☐ 5 – 10 years
☐ Over 10 years

Q2: Can you briefly share your past work experiences in the industry?

Q3: From your own point of view, can you elaborate what fashion is? (or cite any brands that are fashionable in your mind?)

Q4: How would you describe the fashion represented in your publication(s)? (or any fashion brands you can present in your publication?)

Q5: Do you clearly know your publication's target audience(s)? If yes, who are they?

Q6: Are you consciously talking to your target audiences when you write?

Q7: Do you know how your target audiences receive and interpret your messages? If yes, how?

Q8: How do you usually get inspiration and information for your content, layout and styling?

Q9: Do you regularly read other fashion publications, websites and blogs? If yes, can you name some of them?

Q10: To what extent can you express your own ideas about fashion (visually and textually) through your publication? Can you give some examples?

Q11: In the process of writing/design, do you think you are "creating" fashion? Why or why not?

Q12: Do you enjoy the writing/design process? Why/why not?

Q13: Do you use online channels to communicate with your readers? If yes, can you name some of them?

Q14: How do you collaborate with others while executing your editorial ideas at work? (e.g. editorial team, graphic design team, advertising sales team, fashion brand communication team, photographers, stylists, fashion designers, etc.) Have you ever had any conflicts or disputes with them? Any examples?

Q15: To what extent can you defend your own ideas at work? Why?

Q16: Rank the following 6 parties' influence on the Hong Kong/mainland Chinese media's communication of what fashion is.

(6 = most influential; 1 = least influential)

☐ Fashion brands' communication teams
☐ Fashion consumers
☐ Fashion designers/Design teams
☐ Fashion media
☐ Fashion photographers & stylists
☐ Opinion leaders & celebrities

Q17: Rank the following 4 parties' influence on how fashion is viewed within your media organization.

(4 = most influential; 1 = least influential)

☐ Editorial team
☐ Design team
☐ Ad salesmen/Business team
☐ Photographers

Q18: Any other ideas you want to share regarding the fashion media?

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