

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK IN CHINA

**SHAN ZHAI
PRODUCTS
IN
EVERYDAY
LIFE**

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Shanzhai Products in Everyday Life:
Ethnographic fieldwork in China
Master of Arts Thesis

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To maintain the anonymity of all my respondents and informants, only family names are given.

The use of the pictures of my five respondents is by their permission.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In China, authentic and shanzhai (which is related to English words of *copy*, *fake*, *counterfeit* and *grassroots*) products coexist. Widely used by a large amount of Chinese users, shanzhai products that play a significant role in users' everyday life have integrated in the Chinese society. My master thesis is an ethnographic research to investigate shanzhai phenomenon from the perspective of users. In my work, I aim to write a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) in details of the situated behaviors of shanzhai users focusing on everyday use of particular product categories, as well as users' perceptions. Therefore, the materiality of use and users will be described through real-life stories of my informants and their cultural context.

By doing so, shanzhai products will not be over-simplified merely as "brand-alike products with lower price", but rather as the extensions of the user (subject) who purchases and uses particular shanzhai product categories in a socially accepted way in which s/he carefully enacts the identity, solicits comfort, pride and avoids anxiety, shame.

1.1 Research question

Shanzhai phenomenon has multi-layers that are related to consumption, industry and, at the larger extent, cultures and politics. Based on my background in design school, I localize my focus on users.

My research question is:

What are the situated behaviors and knowledge that Chinese shanzhai users employ with shanzhai products in everyday life?

My RQ has two aspects:

- A), dealing with the behaviors that in the way users use shanzhai products in everyday life. Data for this part is mainly from observation and narratives respondents tell in interviews.
- B), about how users perceive their behaviors concerned and shanzhai products. The perceptions are comprised of two aspects:
 - B1), How shanzhai users generate pride or respect from their shanzhai behaviors that are otherwise regarded as deviant?
 - B2), How shanzhai users think about the existence of shanzhai products in Chinese markets in general?

1.2 Background

1.2.1 What is original SHANZHAI (山寨)?

Literally “mountain stronghold” in Chinese language, the term refers to the mountain stockades of warlords or bandits, far away from official control. The extended meaning of *shanzhai* is relevant to the wild and marginal secret societies, occupied by a group of marginalized people encompassing gangs, fighters, entertainers, assassins, thieves, beggars, wanderers and so forth, as opposed to the mainstream official society. Roughly equivalent to the English word of “Bohemian” and “underworld”, the *shanzhai* setting with its own mode of social rules features the romantic and wild sense, albeit with the extra spirit of rebellion and resistance to authority (Xi, 2009). These vagrants who overstep the traditional role boundaries are abandoned and punished by lawful government for their transgression. However, in Chinese folk society, they are respected and celebrated as heroes who defend the weak against the strong usually referring to the corrupt local governments.

Outlaws of the Marsh, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literatures, describes the events which lead 108 people (105 men and 3 women) to abandon lawful society, voluntarily or compulsorily, and band together as leaders of the outlaw fortress on Mt. Liang in the Liangshan Marsh. The 108 heroes, equivalent to the heroic outlaw *Robinhood* in English folklore, are popular characters who fight against the oppressive regime of the government.

In Chinese folklores, *shanzhai* is traditionally concerned with the attitude of resistance, from the marginal societies, against the authority. By the same token, *shanzhai*, initially adopted to describe copycat products, now has developed to a cultural attitude of “if you can do it, so do I” embodied in activities spontaneously organized by ordinary people (Canaves & Ye, 2009).

1.2.2 Shanzhai products

Borrowed from the Chinese folklores, in the term of materiality, *shanzhai*, initially, albeit with further extended meaning later, refer to the Chinese imitation and pirated products with a much

lower price than the original ones, escaping far away from the control of regulation. Shanzhai products cover a large range of categories from industrial products, including automobile and electronic gadgets, to garments that people wear.

The predecessor of "shanzhai" is "counterfeit". Such products have existed widely in Chinese market since the Opening-up Policy in the 1980s. The first time that the name of "shanzhai" was introduced to the materiality field is in the mobile phone industry.

The story started in 2005, when MTK, a Taiwanese microchip design company, developed a new "turnkey solution" - a platform that integrated many complex mobile phone software systems onto a single chip. MTK chips enabled developers to build handsets and churn out new models at astounding speeds without costly R&D funding (RedTech Advisors, 2010). The shanzhai business saw another boost in 2007 when the Chinese government dismissed the license requirement for producing mobile phones. This move lowers the entry threshold for hundreds of entrepreneurs eager to share the world's biggest mobile phone market.

Since then, shanzhai mobile phones have caused considerable concern. "Shanzhai mobile phone" is in the Google.cn's Most Searched List in 2008. In the same year, an estimated 150 million, or 20 percent, of the 750 million handsets produced in China were shanzhai mobile phones, according to CCID Consulting, a Beijing-based market research firm. Over 51 million were sold in China while the remainders were sent to foreign markets (Farra, 2009).

1.2.3 One person, one shanzhai

The term of shanzhai, used widely though, lacks sanctioned or authorized definition. It is used by people differently based on their own understandings. It leads to diversity and complexity of the meaning of shanzhai.

For some, shanzhai refers to all the non-authentic products; for some, shanzhai is exclusively used for mobile phones; for some, shanzhai means local adaption of the global offerings involved; for some, shanzhai only means low price.

Each user, with his or her own theory of shanzhai, chooses to

use each category of shanzhai products in different usage situations. Each one has his or her own story of shanzhai, which reveals who they are in everyday life.

1.3 Literature Review

My literature review is comprised of two parts. The first part takes the cultural sense of shanzhai products beyond criticism. For some sociologists, shanzhai products are extended to a type of sub-culture that is resistant against the authority. Although my work centers on the behaviors and perceptions of individual shanzhai users, the arguments referring to the concepts of politics, power relation and cultural collectives will be briefly presented below.

The second part is mostly done by marketing researchers who focus on the consumption behaviors of users. The basic assumption that they share is that purchasing shanzhai products are deviant and unethical. And they studied shanzhai users in order to provide implications to diminish the inappropriate behaviors. I will clarify the difference between my approach and theirs, and further put forward my criticism.

1.3.1 Adaption of global offerings

Shanzhai products are known for their flexibility of design for specific local markets, most of which are marginal and untapped places for western designers and researchers. For instance, many shanzhai cell phones have double SIM card slots that effectively address the needs of Chinese users who often use an additional local number when they travel. For global companies, shanzhai design is a precious opportunity to observe how local Chinese culture adapts and improvises their offerings. Shanzhai design serves to adjust price, aesthetics and functions to make products accessible to common folks (Taniguchi & Wu, 2009). From the viewpoint of design methods, shanzhai design is more about prototyping as a part of the research progress. It is also a good chance to learn cultural others.

1.3.2 Platform for grassroots innovation and self-expression

The lowering of technical threshold owing to the “total solution chip” by MTK has invited a large amount of people to shanzhai businesses, many of which with a dozen employees operating in a small apartment or basement of a private home (Johnson, 2010). The opportunity arrives for the grassroots innovation, contextually, defined as *shanzhai design* that goes far beyond imitation that is criticized as plagiarisms.

With a glance at the Chinese cell phone market, aside from the exquisite and proper global designs, one will be surprised by these marvelous grassroots design that definitely challenges the imagination of anyone. These designs are wild and humorous, introducing a vivid image of the genius Chinese grassroots people who adopt an unconventional way to design. Certainly shanzhai industry creates infinite possibilities for wild grassroots innovation in such a way that other established cell phone companies are not able to achieve.

"This is an important way to cultivate grassroots innovation," said Jack Qiu, a communications professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong (Farra, 2009). Li, a professor at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangdong Province, claimed that shanzhai "represents non-mainstream ideas and innovations, and it's also a new way for common people to express what they want." (Yao, 2009)

Shanzhai culture bears the imprint of grassroots innovation and wisdom of ordinary people. It is the result of the consciousness awakening of the mass. While the mainstream culture is the main impetus of social development, shanzhai culture, which goes beyond merely copy and pirated, bears a spirit of enterprising arising from the imitation of the mainstream culture (Li, 2009).

1.3.3 Resistance against the monopoly

Recently shanzhai is not merely about products, but also related to social activities, spontaneously organized by ordinary people, that imitate the official counterparts. Thus, the meaning of shanzhai has been extended to the spirit of “resistance against monopoly and authority”.

A large number of people in China, namely the under-

privileged grassroots people, struggle in the margin of the society. The society is monopolized by the dominant culture by the elite, and grassroots people have slim chance to be heard or served (Li, 2010; Zhou & Gao, 2001). Shanzhai provides the possibilities for grassroots people to articulate their needs and desires, and to develop various cultural values (Xi, 2009). Many Chinese scholars have realized that shanzhai products and phenomenon reveal the discontentment of the current established rules and the resistance against the elite culture and authority from grassroots people (Wang, 2009; Zheng et al, 2009; Zhuangshi, 2010). The spirit of “an overthrowing performance chain to business authority by folk creativity initiated from bottom to top” that shanzhai culture bears attracts lots of staunch supporters from the bottom, especially those netizens (Xuan, 2009).

Furthermore, shanzhai culture brings a sense of democracy. It provides equal opportunities for people to enjoy advanced technology monopolized by the big companies, and to possess more rights of vocalization. Shanzhai culture that has rapidly grown up within the cyber space is not only the emerging of a subculture, but also alters “the nation’s culture makeup, landscape and taste” (Jiang, 2009).

1.3.4 Material culture of identity

As I previously considered shanzhai as the process of adaption of global offerings to meet local needs as well as the platform for grassroots innovation, I will further discuss the role of shanzhai products that plays in people’s everyday life from the customers’ approach.

In everyday life, the objects that surround people and the way they interact with the objects can be considered as the more tangible way to convey shared “values, activities and lifestyles” (Dant, 1999). The material culture is closely related to the process of identity formation. One is able to approach the theoretical relation by asking customers some informal questions: Why do you buy this shanzhai product? When do you use it? How do you use it? This set of questions indicates that consumption behavior embodied in the choices people make and the way they use the objects is orientated to express the identity in the social context.

Shanzhai products, particularly evolving in Chinese

contemporary society, address explicitly the needs of the society in which they are developed. The popularity of the products is not merely due to the low prices but also for more complex cultural factors. It will be rewarding to investigate how people assert their identity by the consumption of shanzhai products.

1.3.5 Not all the problems are soluble

We live in a world where counterfeit products have existed for a long period of time. From the literatures we can see that scholars (especially western ones) share the same opinion that counterfeit products are illegal and purchases concerned are deviant, dysfunctional and illicit. This ethical model is the fundamental tone shared by all the sociological, economic and marketing scholars when they conducted research on the issue in question. The aim of all the researches is to understand the motivations underlying such “abnormal” consumer behaviors, in order to diminish such behaviors, to reduce the societal loss caused by counterfeit products, and to solve the social and economic problem. They perceive doing so would be useful to reduce these unethical behaviors, and ideally contribute to the betterment of our society where, as they believe, a clean and strict economical mechanism is needed.

But, unfortunately, since the first group of scholars (Bush et al, 1989; Ehrlich, 1986; Harvey, 1987) worked on counterfeit products, their attempts have had little effect. Counterfeit products continue to be consumed. The categories of counterfeit products increase. The consumption behavior patterns become complex. New social influences are emerging all the time. The road of solving the problem seems endless ahead.

I think, instead of approaching counterfeit products as a problem to be solved, it is wiser to position it as a phenomenon to learn. Instead of forbidding and punishing counterfeit purchases, it is wiser to lead consumers into a more healthy way.

Shanzhai phenomenon evolves in the current Chinese industrial and cultural society that is closely associated with the global whole. Hence it is interesting and complex enough that it is worthy to be deeply investigated in the way which both negative aspects and positive potentials are to be discussed. If one tries to approach the shanzhai phenomenon with the perspective

of cultural variation without bias, more interesting things are to be explored.

It is worthy to note again that the subject of my work is telling the themes of the story of shanzhai phenomenon happening in Chinese society. It enables people to adopt more open lens to shanzhai. If people start without bias and are capable of understanding the multifaceted aspects of the phenomenon, they may give a better appreciation of knowing what is happening. And after reading it, audience will have their own ideas about how to do about it on their own purpose.

1.4 Position of the Researcher

I received academic industrial design education in a design school in China. In Taik, I learned Scandinavian-tradition design research methods, like design probes, participatory design and design game. However, when working in project to understand users, as a designer, I realized my limits of understanding the deep meanings hidden in the user's experience and emotions, as well as user's cultural and social context. Therefore, I decided to take courses of cultural anthropology to learn theoretic knowledge. With my increasing interests in anthropology, I continued to take courses concerning ethnographic fieldwork and interpretative methods of qualitative research. Therefore, partly as a designer and an ethnographer, I choose ethnographic research related to users and the material culture as my master thesis so that I can have a chance to practice the knowledge that I learn in school.

As a Chinese, I did my field research in China. Doing ethnographic research "at home", I have the advantage of mastering local language and cultural conventions. More importantly, with the topic of shanzhai that is officially regarded as unethical or illegal, I can get to know what the respondents really think while foreign researchers may not have access. However, when doing research "at home", one may also tend to take too much for granted. The problem of "home-blindness" does not appear problematic for me. The reason is I am not a shanzhai user so the shanzhai users that I am studying are "others" for me.

CHAPTER TWO

**METHODOLOGIC
FRAMEWORK**

2.1 Ethnography

Ethnographic investigation arose from the practice of cultural anthropology, spearheaded especially by Bronislaw Malinowski in his work on the Trobriand Islands, albeit with different flavours and emphases. Malinowski famously argued that through daily participation in everyday life, one can understand “the member’s point of view”. It adopts a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them. When participating with the culture that ethnographers are studying, they are required to respect the culture and people without cultural bias. Thus ethnography advocates long-term, immersive field work combining observation with participation.

Collecting data is just part of ethnography. Understanding and analyzing the data about what is happening in the context is the core of ethnographic fieldwork (Forsythe, 1999). The analysis of data involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions in its cultural context (Silverman, 2006; Wasson, 2002).

Here, I provide a simple definition of ethnography given by Brewer (2000):

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or “field” by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner.

2.2 Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology, following Garfinkel (1976), attempts to understand “folk” (*ethno*) methods (*methodology*) for interacting with the world and others and for making sense of the reality. It is concerned with exploring the methods and common sense knowledge that members employ in everyday lives to organize actual daily affairs and to make social settings “accountable”. One main aspect of Ethnomethodology is to focus on the “procedural aspects of member’s situated practice, not on overall causes, conditions or effects of those practices” (Ten Have, 2004).

The approach “seeks to describe methods persons use in doing social life” (Sacks, 1984, p21). As Garfinkel (1976) stated that ethnomethodological research are not directed to formulating correctives:

They do not formulate a remedy for practical actions, as if it was being found about practical actions that they were better or worse than they are usually cracked up to be. Nor are they in search of humanistic arguments, nor do they engage in or encourage permissive discussion of theory.

My ethnographic research attempts to 1) draw a picture of what “shanzhai phenomenon” looks like from insiders’ account, 2) to examine cautiously what the methods and common sense knowledge insiders (more precisely shanzhai users) use to produce actual scenic practices that make the phenomenon observable and accountable, 3) to understand how “shanzhai phenomenon” is locally produced through the daily activities of shanzhai users in the social settings (Silverman, 2006). And it is worthy to note that any practice and knowledge is always seen as “local” and “time-bound” as Silverman (2006) and Ten Have (2004) emphasized.

2.3 Methods and Analysis

2.3.1 Participant observation

Participant Observation is a qualitative method with its

roots in traditional ethnographic research. With its anthropological tradition, the method requires researchers to immerse themselves in a local culture by participating insiders' daily lives to observe what they are actually doing and saying in the real-life field. This method puts researchers where the action is and enables them to experience the lives of people that they are studying as much as possible. In addition researchers are able to collect all sorts of data, like narratives and numbers, as much as they can (Russell, 2001, p323-324).

According to ethnomethodological model, Wolcott (1990) suggested researchers to ask the general questions when they are in the field:

- 1, what is going on there?
- 2, what do people in this setting have to know individually and collectively in order to do what they are doing?
- 3, how are skills and attitudes transmitted in the absence of intentional efforts at instruction?

2.3.2 In-depth interview

While ethnographic observation is to aim at gaining natural occurring data, interviews are intended to access respondents' perceptions, attitudes and values. And in-depth interviews that encourage interviewees to learn everything that interviewees can share about the topic leads to increased insight in depth. This qualitative technique is effective when researcher seeks information concerning with personal matters, like individual's life experience, values and cultural knowledge about the particular events and phenomenon, as well as the insights and methods they use to interpret and order the world (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p104).

In-depth interviews are conducted usually face-to-face and involve one interviewer and one respondent. During the interview, interviewer is required to engage with respondents by posing questions in an unbiased manner, listening attentively respondent's accounts, and constantly posing following-up questions. During the interactive process, interviewer and

respondent together create the shared knowledge through the ensuring discussion (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p107).

My in-depth interviews will be tape-recorded and handwritten field notes will be taken at the same time. The transcription will be written based on the recordings soon after the interviews.

According to the Ethnomethodological model, the respondents' accounts could be interpreted as the cultural way of packaging experience or self-expression, rather than the evidence of their real experience (Silverman, 2006). It means not only what they say, but also how they say should be taken into account. Accounts should be seen as situated practices which is "local accomplishment" invoking a sense of social structure.

For instance, none of my respondents admitted the influence of symbolic value of brands in their purchase process. They always had reasons that they thought to be reasonable and appropriate to explain their shanzhai purchases: low price, favorable visual attributes, and practical functions. The accounts of my respondents in the interviews appear to be in some extent contradictory to famous national obsession of luxury brands and to the wide existence of counterfeit products of famous brands. When we look beyond their accounts and combine what I have observed with what they actually do, a situated sense of brand and an understanding of a particular consumption pattern is revealed. People purchase in the pursuit of the symbolic value of brands and at the same time they perceive such consumption pattern as inappropriate and immature.

2.4 Thick Description

Clifford Geertz, one of the most influential anthropologists, in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) discusses that as an ethnographer, in order to generate and transmit the knowledge about a culture, one must write "thick description". As I understand it, thick description refers to writing, as much as details, all the possible interpretive meanings behind the behaviors through which the cultural forms find articulation. Besides the behaviors, the contexts of the behaviors should be described to enable the reader to appreciate the full significance

of ethnographic texts. One characteristic of thick description is the belief that everything can be done and described on a small scale in a way that a culture is interpreted. Although thick description may appear similar to fiction, Geertz's aim was to treat the texts rather as "that we shall learn to read with a more perceptive eye" (1988, p24).

In my work, I will write two pieces of thick descriptions: one is about my experience as a normal customer in a secret fake bag store in Shanghai; the other is about one shanzhai user, Jiang, who took me to the particularly selected public places during the weekend in Shanghai.

2.5 Shanzhai Users and Products In My Model

To answer my research questions, there are three elements involved in my main chapter: shanzhai users, shanzhai products and the relation between the subject and objects.

I will tell the shanzhai story as a whole by describing the characteristics of the two elements. For shanzhai users, I will discuss 1), to what extent the user is influenced by western consumer culture from the aspects of the sense of brand, brand knowledge; 2), way of identity expression; 3), the perceived social self. For shanzhai products, I will discuss 1), level of imitation according to the "Non-authentic Product Categories" in chapter four; 2), price, visual value, use value and symbolic value.

According to the variables of shanzhai users and product categories, the way of use and role of subjects in users' everyday life vary. The stories of the selected informants will be depicted in details in order to map a vivid picture of "who is using what, why and how".

CHAPTER THREE

**DOING
FIELDWORK**

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK



3.1 Entering Fields

From June to August, 2010, I conducted my fieldwork in Shanghai, the commercial and financial centre of mainland China. Due to the rapid economic and cultural development during the past two decades, Shanghai, featuring its fusion of western and oriental culture, has become one of the most influential metropolises in the world. Described by BBC (2008) as “show piece” of booming economy in China, Shanghai constantly attracts talents from home and abroad, as well as a large amount of low-skilled migrant workers from inland China. Thus Shanghai is a city full of diversity where any type of lifestyle, ranging from extravagant to frugal, from west to east, can be seen.

I visited four places exclusively selling shanzhai products in both urban and suburban areas in Shanghai.

The first one is the biggest shanzhai mobile phone market near Shanghai railway station. The four-floor building, originally built as a department shopping mall, is covered by golden reflective glasses which look rather pretentiously luxurious.

The second one is the biggest and oldest clothing wholesale market with its center located in Hongkou area. It is famous for the variety of cheap counterfeit clothes and accessories.

The third one is a set of stores secretly selling counterfeit bags of luxury brands hidden in the residential apartments in Huaihai area, one of the biggest CBDs in Shanghai.

The fourth one is a leather bag trade center, which is located along Hangzhou-Shanghai Expressway, about one-hour drive from Shanghai. Exquisitely decorated, the retailer sells both national leather bag brands and counterfeit bags of luxury brands. Identified as a tourist place, a large amount of tourist shoppers,

individual or in group, are from cities nearby and even from places far away.

Unlike other fieldworks, the access to the fields was very easy for me and my observation in the fields encountered very little trouble, because 1), these fields are public sales places that invite anyone. 2), I am a Chinese, speaking local language, who is no difference from any other normal consumer. However, when I was about to take photos with my digital camera in the shanzhai mobile phone market, one salesman came to ask me who I was.

3.2 Taking Field Notes

In my first time that I went to field, I took my digital camera in order to take some photos. Later I found the presence of the equipment made me look like a journalist rather than a consumer, which did not help me at all when communicating with local people, salesmen and other consumers, or collect naturally occurring data. Therefore I decided to only take my notebook and a small pen to field. Whenever I found things interesting in the field, I would briefly take furtive notes or make sketches if it was possible. Roger Sanjek (1990, p96) called it "scratch notes".

After I left the field, I immediately ran home, sat down and wrote up field notes. As Russell (2001, p373) suggested "the faster you write up your observation, the more details you can get down" and "more is better, much more is much better", I spent five to six hours writing all the details every time that I visited the field. My "description notes"(Russell, 2001, p375) includes the environment of the place that I visited, the activities of people that I have observed, the dialogues and conversations that I have heard or I participated in, the people that I have encountered.

At the same time, I kept writing diaries where my personal emotions and thoughts were recorded.

3.3 Stakeholder Interviews

Before approaching shanzhai users, in order to grasp a general idea about shanzhai phenomenon in the Chinese context, I did

unstructured interviews with eleven people working in various fields that are related to shanzhai phenomenon. I asked them to talk about their roles in or relations with shanzhai industry and their opinions about shanzhai products, and the phenomenon as a whole.

My respondents are:

- 1) two shanzhai mobile phone designers working in Shenzhen, the shanzhai mobile phone industry hub;
- 2) a strategic designer in a national mobile phone brand company that has just successfully transformed from shanzhai company;
- 3) a design manager in a telecom company in Shanghai;
- 4) a design educator in a design school in Shanghai;
- 5) an editor in design and art magazine;
- 6) a HF researcher with business background;
- 7) a HF researcher with anthropology background;
- 8) an IP lawyer;
- 9) twenty-two shanzhai users in *douban.com*.

I conducted five face-to-face interviews and four phone interviews. For the ninth respondents, I asked them to write their stories to me by mails. For each interview, I took notes. Five interviews were tape recorded and each had its transcription.

3.4 In-depth Interviews With Shanzhai Users

The main part of field work is in-depth interviews with nine shanzhai users who currently live in Shanghai or near Shanghai. When selecting informants, I intended to ensure the diversity of my informants who are varied in terms of education, birth place, age, career and income. Thus, I hypothesized these variables may lead to various brand and product knowledge, consumption behavior patterns and perceptions of shanzhai.

The process of looking for participants and asking for permission was difficult. My initial idea was to interview strangers. Therefore, I spent almost two months in the fields seeking participants in the fields by building my reputation and gaining their trust. Finally I got five. Then I got four more from my friends. The nine respondents are all shanzhai users who,

frequently or occasionally, purchase shanzhai products.

After I got their permission for the interview, for each of my respondents, I invited them to café or tea house, provided them food and drink, and started with casual chat. I recorded all the interviews and later made the transcriptions in both Chinese and English. Averagely I spent twelve hours on the transcriptions for two-hour interviews.

During the interview, I asked about their prior experience related to shanzhai products, their opinions about shanzhai products and phenomenon as well as their behaviors concerned, and their understandings of the eight objects that I presented to them.

By doing so, I intended to investigate

- 1) what role shanzhai products play in their everyday life;
- 2) how they define shanzhai products, and how they understand and perceive the phenomenon from users' perspectives;
- 3) what are their skills and common sense knowledge so as to solicit comfort, pride or to avoid anxiety, shame or boredom.

3.5 Hanging Out

In addition to the in-depth interviews, I hanged out with two informants Jiang and Jin. I asked Jiang, the young photographer, to take me to his favored places in Shanghai during a weekend. We went to his favourite stores, Café, bar and market. A piece of thick description about the "hanging out" can be seen in "Jiang" chapter. Jin opens a bag shop in the Trade Center. I frequently visited her shop and sometimes we went out to shop and eat together.

PROFILES OF NINE RESPONDENTS

All the information below is from the interviews with the nine respondents. The content of “shanzhai products” is from the question “tell me all the shanzhai products that you bought”. Most of them started with the first one they bought when they were children. Due to the lack of brand knowledge of Yang and Ding, some shanzhai ones that they unknowingly bought are missing. The “urban/rural” is related to the cultural capital, brand/product knowledge and influence of the western consumer culture of the respondents.

	JIANG	HU	JIN	WANG.YY	WANG.J	DING	YANG	ZHANG	PAN
age	24	28	35	24	27	39	22	23	25
career	photographer @own studio	manager @private com.	businessman @own shop	teacher @high school	salesman @bank	businessman @own factory	barber @hair salon	accountant @rural factory	ITer @government
B.P.	urban	urban	urban	urban	urban	rural	rural	rural	urban
Edu.	BA.	BSc.	high school	BA.	BSc.	primary school	high school	BSc.	BSc.
income ¥/m	4000	13000	8000	3000	3500	20000	2000	2300	3500
what's shanzhai	vulgar local design	vulgar local design	cheap bad quality	bad copy	copy grassroots'	cheap bad quality non-brand	cheap bad quality non-brand national brand	copy cheap	copy cheap bad quality
shanzhai products related to Non-Authentic Product Categories									

CHAPTER FOUR

**NON-AUTHENTIC
PRODUCT
CATEGORIES**

4.1 Aim

What is a shanzhai product? It is probably the most difficult question in my work.

The challenge can be seen clearly in one simple example. We can simply choose a product family *shanzhai Chanel bag*. Among the categories, the most expensive member is the undistinguishable delicate replica. The replica is made with finest leather and exquisite techniques, sold in some secret stores or hidden shelves. With the price of ¥2000, it is intentionally purchased by urban fashionable girls or middle-class ladies. Another member is a counterfeit bag at the price from ¥100-¥300. It imitates the general appearance of the original one, albeit with some details changed sometimes, like the position of the logo, a character in the brand name, or the material of the belt. Students who are aware of brand identity are the main users. The cheapest category is the one that can be any bag, plastic or artificial leather, big or small, round or square, with the explicit *Chanel* logo. Except the logo, the image of the bag has little relation with a *Chanel* one. Appearing extensively in low-class markets, chances are that it is unknowingly purchased by people who have little knowledge about *Chanel*, or by the ones who only heard about the brand name. Each story attached to each product varies from one to another. So does their definitions of shanzhai.










Up to the point when I faced this challenge, I have been mostly concerned with the complexity of the concept of shanzhai. In order to tell various shanzhai stories, it is important to classify shanzhai products into categories which are characterized by the corresponding attributes. Therefore, I create "non-authentic shanzhai product category graph" based on my data collected from markets and users. Considering the blurry boundary of

shanzhai and non-shanzhai products, all the non-authentic products will be included in my categories.

The non-authentic products are classified into five categories according to their similarity with authentic products, ranging from the highest degree of similarity to the lowest one. I choose "similarity" as my classificatory criteria because of the reason as follows: non-authentic products have two variables- "imitation" and "innovation"-that characterize shanzhai products. The change of the two basic variables leads to the change of other variables- products attributes (like price, quality), values (symbolic, aesthetic and practical), sale place, users and usage. The five categories are named respectively using the metaphor of the phases of moon as 1), Full Category, 2), Gibbous Category, 3), Quarter Category, 4), Crescent Category, 5), New Category. The size of the shape corresponds with the level of similarity.

NON-AUTHENTIC PRODUCT CATEGORIES

The non-authentic products are classified into five categories according to the similarity with authentic products, ranging from the highest level of similarity to the lowest one. The change of the two basic variables- imitation and innovation- leads to the change of other variables- products attributes (price, quality), values (symbolic, aesthetic and practical), sale places, users and use scenarios.

	 WEARABLE GARMENTS clothes shoes bags accessories underwear	 TECHNOLOGIC GADGETS mobilephone mp3/mp4 laptop camera auto	 CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS books movies music software TV programs	 OTHERS foods cosmetics furnitures architectures
 FULL undistinguishable				
 GIBBOUS hard to distinguish				
 QUARTER partly copy				
 CRESCENT lightly copy				
 NEW local design				

4.2 Non-authentic Product Categories



Full Category

This category has the highest level of similarity with the authentic products. We can almost claim that, from the products only, there is no difference between the authentic and non-authentic one. The non-authentic one possesses the same appearance, material, function and weight with the authentic counterpart. The smuggled electronic gadgets, the leftover garments and delicate replicas of luxury brands are three important instances. The products in this category have good quality and relatively higher price than ones in other categories. The users may have relatively high social and economic status and rich brand knowledge. They may value the quality of products.

The delicate replicas of luxury brands will be introduced later.



Gibbous Category

“Gibbous Category” includes counterfeit products that are almost identical with the authentic ones. Compared with the A-replicas that have no different product attributes, ones here have more noticeable though subtle differences. For instance, the most common ones are counterfeit bags or shoes with the same appearance and yet inferior quality, or counterfeit mobile phones with the same appearance and another OS (Operating System). Products with techniques, like professional shoes or electronic gadgets, do not have the A-replicas because of the obstacles of techniques while bags and clothes are much easier to be exquisitely imitated.

Wearable counterfeit products, like garments, shoes and accessories, in this category that cost a fraction of original price and similar appearance are very popular among shanzhai users who have the consciousness of the symbolic value of the brands. In many cases, young people and migrant workers who have less money and appreciate the brand name purchase this category often. Some of them are trend-followers.

Mobile Phone is another significant member of this category. Every newly launched trendy brand mobile phone is immediately followed by its delicate counterfeit one. The shortest time gap can be only five days. It reflects the efficient and quick response of

shanzhai mobile phone companies to the market.



Quarter and Crescent Category

Products in the two categories are characterized by both imitation of brand products and their appropriation.



They partly imitate the distinctive design or logos of the original one, with the combination of indigenous design.

For instance, a mobile phone with similar appearance with *Nokia* N97 albeit with smaller keyboard and a NOKLE logo; a pair of shoes of the classic pattern of *Converse* with extra paintings; or a bag with both *LV* monogram and *Gs* of *Gucci*. However as for the partial imitation, I want to point out that such imitation can be seen also some products of legitimate national brand companies. Despite their legitimacy, such products are still called shanzhai by a large amount of people.

In addition to the imitation part, the appropriation part which is recently regarded by some scholars as grassroots innovation has attracted more attention.

Most products are usually sold in low-class market with a low price tag. And in many cases people with the lack of brand knowledge unknowingly buy such products.



New Category

“New Category” with very little relation to authentic products features the innovation by local industry.

“Grassroots innovation” is one aspect of the cultural meaning of the term of shanzhai. It is embodied in the products of this category. The wild and unconventional design by grassroots people have been discussed in the “background” chapter. Some grassroots mobile phones will be shown later.

From the “nine respondents” diagram, we can see Jiang and Hu bought some products in the category. They were attracted by the interesting and novelty of the products. Hu bought a shanzhai watch:

Once, I went to grocery market with my friend. This market features the fake products. I bought a watch. It was a stupid one. The watch was very weird, complex and yet interesting, with a horoscope map on the surface. And it was only ¥100. Later I found

that, oh my god, there was the logo Packfree, the top watch brand in the world. I never wore that. I played with it for 2-3 days. Then I lost interest.

Hu never intended to replace the shanzhai one of his *Armani* watch. Hu played the watch at home for several days and threw it away when he got bored.

Hu is not alone. When one finds certain functions or appearance interesting or new, he or she will purchase the products for the novelty and playful purpose. These products, however, may not be used for long, or be taken seriously. Here, shanzhai products are bought to be *played* rather than to be used. "Play" is the word that shanzhai users frequently used to express their casual attitudes towards their purchased shanzhai products:

- I just bought it for fun;
- I played it for a couple of days;
- It's not bad to buy them for playing for a while.

It is just like a tourist buys souvenirs when he or she goes to other places away from home. Cases are that souvenirs from other cultures, that are found novel and interesting though, may not be regarded as the main objects that play a crucial role in users' everyday life. The shanzhai products in this category, designed by an unconventional way that established companies will not adopt, create a sense of *otherness* in the margin of the market.

● A 货 | A-replicas of luxury brands

The sources of the delicate replicas of luxury brands are unknown, various, complex and yet unimportant. What is important to us is the reality that the delicate replicas are identical with the authentic ones in substance, shape, size, color, pattern and every detail like zippers. Except some experts, no one is able to distinguish them from the authentic ones even when he or she holds them in hands. In China, the delicate replicas of luxury brands have a resounding name "A 货". "A" refers to the first quality.

Due to a large number of A-replicas of luxuries available in the market, the frequent occurrences of people using such products and the continuous discussions on the issues concerned, A-replicas are an important part of non-authentic products. The product categories are various encompassing bags, purses, sunglasses, scarves, watches and jewelries.

The remarkable phenomenon of A-replica luxury item purchase has long history that has been noticed and studied (Phau, 2009; Gentry, 2001). The explanation is commonly known and generally accepted. When western luxury brands represent status and wealth, luxury products becomes national obsession including all classes. It is not coincident that Louis Vuitton and *Gucci* sell the best in Asia and are the most popular brands being imitated. The *LV* monogram and *Gucci* Gs as patterns all over the bags become the most instantly recognizable symbols (Chadh & Husband, 2006, p20). For people who cannot afford the high price, they go for the next alternatives which are the much cheaper counterfeit products that bore the insignia. The symbolic function of the logos remains even when other product attributes change.

I do not deny this explanation that the obsession in the society for luxury brands accounts for most of the phenomenon. However one of my respondents, who is a big fan of this category, portrays herself as a "wise consumer" who will not invest ¥10000 on one single bag. Rather than blindly purchasing for the brand name, she regards herself as being able to appreciate the design and good quality of the product itself. The users of A-replicas and their attitude towards the blind brand seekers¹⁾ will be further discussed in the chapter of "shanzhai users". Compared with the users who purchase replicas with inferior quality, users of A-replicas highly value the quality of their possessions in life. They may possess the authentic ones at the same time. Usually they have rich knowledge about the brands that they purchase.

1), Blind brand seekers are commonly called "parvenus 暴发户" in China. Shanzhai users Jiang, Hu and Jin mentioned the type of people as "stupid and uneducated" in order to generate pride from their shanzhai behaviors.

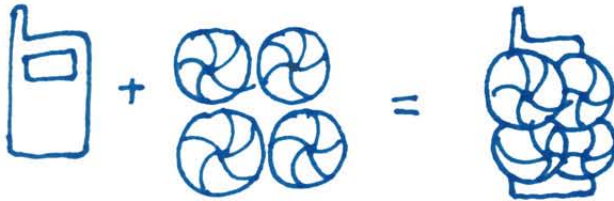
GRASSROOTS MOBILEPHONES

1. The longest standby time- two years

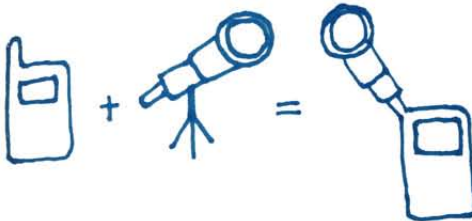
This cell phones with super-large capacity battery of 32800 mAh stands out for its two-year standby time. What's more one can keep making calls for 120 consecutive hours without charging.



2. One furnished with four camera lenses



3. Combination of mobile phone and telescope



4. Bomber

With the nickname of Bomber, it is furnished with the exaggeratedly huge speaker that is equivalent to any professional one in the term of volum. Definitely one is the bomber while playing Rock'n'Roll with this cell phone in the car on the road.



5. Customalized for the Buddhist

Visually the design language of this type with golden color, lines abstracted from lotus and jade buttons is inspired from Buddhism. What is more that some specific functions serve the way in which the Buddhist conduct the religious practices. The portrait of the Buddha in the back is symbolized as the amulet to expel evil and invoke blessings. A blessing card while the prayer is preaching with in the consecration ceremony is given away. And ¥5 is donated for charity automatically if one buys one handset.



6. Panda cigarette

Panda cigarette, the privileged brand of Chairman Mao, represents the nobility for Chinese smokers. The extraordinary highlight is the combination of the functions of mobile phone and cigarette box which is capable for seven cigarettes, with the accessorial golden lighter.



SHANZHAI PUMA LOGOS



CHAPTER FIVE

SHANZHAI USERS



name	JIANG Z.W.
age	24
Edu.	Bachelor of Arts
B.P.	TX(small coastal city)
L.P.	Shanghai
career	Photographer
income	¥5000/m
Rlat.status	in a Rlat.
father	ruralentrepreneur

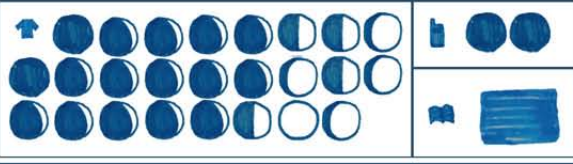
rich brand knowledge

shanzhai products cheap and beautiful wearable ones

way of use a high level of disposability

shanzhai is vulgar grassroots design

pride good taste and passion for life



Cheap and beautiful objects to show good taste

Jiang is a young photographer who has just opened his studio in Shanghai. Jiang continuously purchases “cheap and beautiful wearable objects” as his expressive equipments to enact his identity, which is good taste and passion for life. And he uses these trendy pieces in a high level of disposability. Cheap counterfeit products of fashion brands, mainly western brands, are selected as his expressive objects.

There are three influences to make this shanzhai product category enters Jiang's life: the western consumer culture, lifestyle media and the perceived image of “others” in China.

Firstly, Jiang actively adopts the idea of western contemporary consumer culture featuring 1), “aesthetic obsolescence” that many commodities are distinguished by the aesthetic attributes and are disposed of because they are “out of fashion” instead of being used up (Lee, 1993, p136); 2) that commodities are closely articulated with identity construction and individual sense of style (Featherstone, 1991, p86).

Secondly, Jiang passionately follows the stories that lifestyle media, such as fashion magazines, television programs and advertisings, make about taste and life. These “nicely packaged and entertaining” lives are featured the beautiful and romantic objects, fancy restaurants and never-working-always-travel style (Blumenthal, 2005). The magazine-style documentaries that distort the reality of real lives are especially favored by Jiang. Generally, Jiang attempts to live the one in magazine.

Thirdly, Jiang lives in a country where the majority of the population, in his point of view, has no taste and lives a boring and ordinary life which is lack of personal dreams and hobbies. At the same time a group of newly rich people are investing a huge amount of money on luxury brand products to show their

economic status and to gain social-esteem. The group commonly called as “parvenus” in China are criticized by Jiang as “still vulgar and stupid”. To be distinctive from the “others”, Jiang is eager to show his good taste by consumption with the least expense.

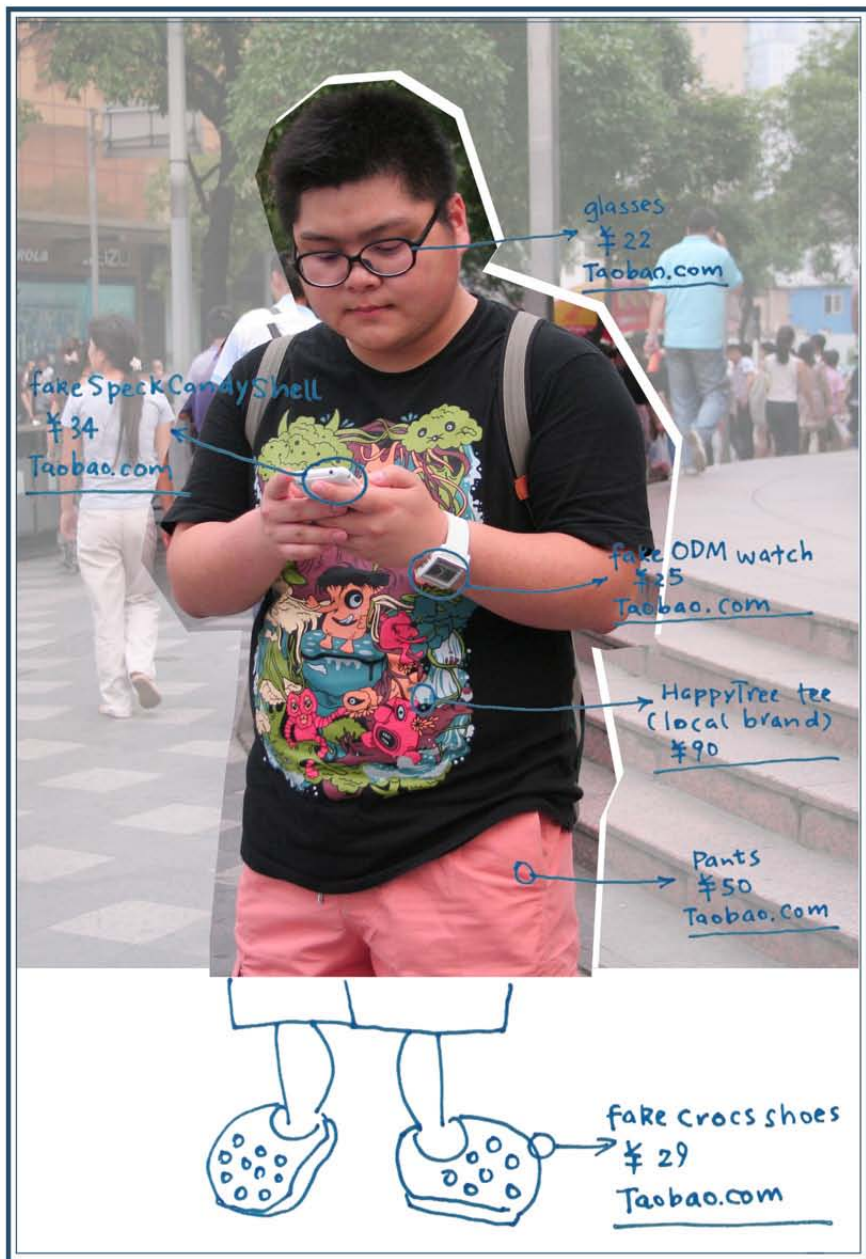
In the following chapters, I will explain how Jiang uses “cheap and beautiful wearable objects” to express the ideal self by presenting a piece of thick description of “hanging out” at first, and second examining his expressive objects later.

THICK DESCRIPTION

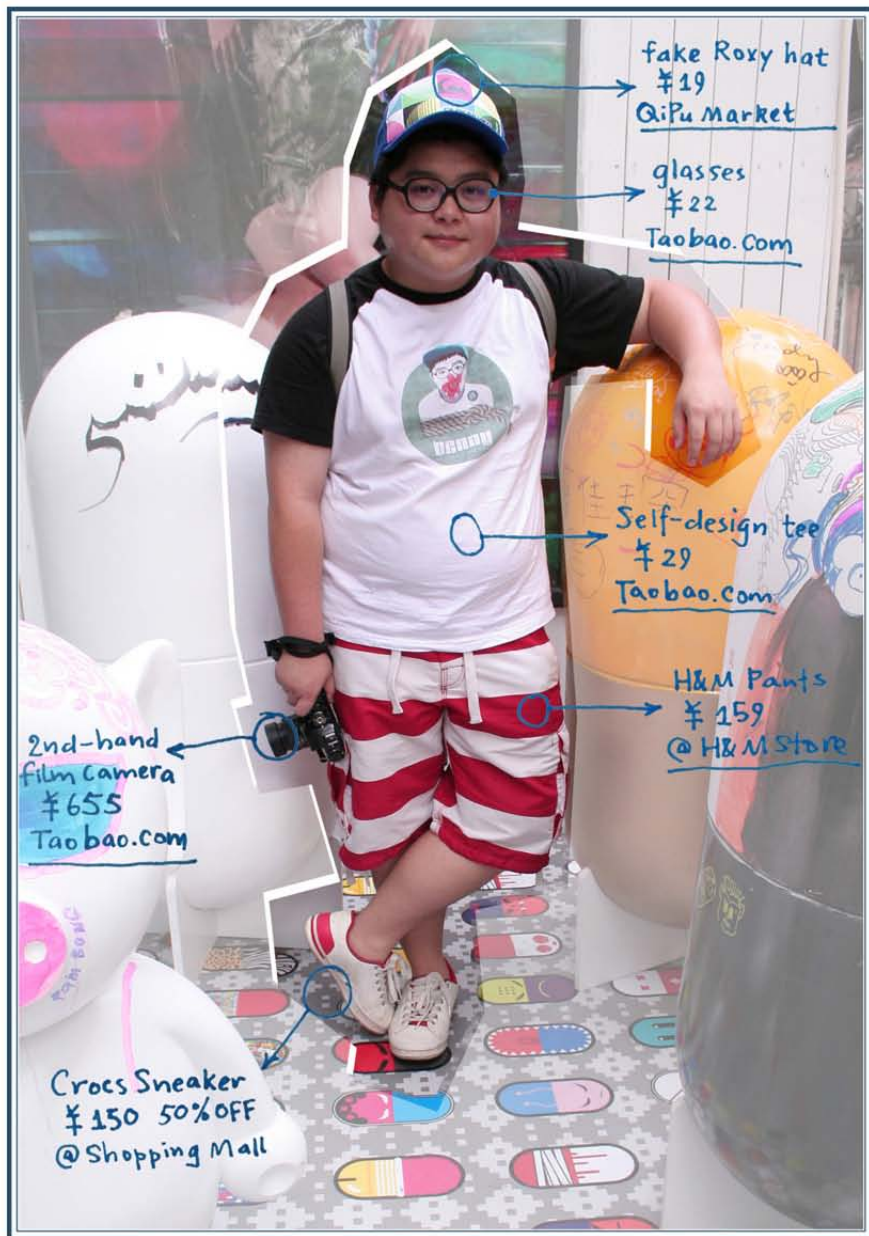
HANGING OUT WITH JIANG

19-20 JUNE, 2010
SHANGHAI
WU YIYING AND JIANG

HANGING OUT WITH JIANG: 1ST DAY



HANGING OUT WITH JIANG: 2ND DAY



Jiang is my high school classmate. We have not seen each other for two years. When I heard that he bought many counterfeit products, I decided to hang out with him and took him as one of my key informants. After persuading his father, a successful rural entrepreneur, to offer him financial support, finally Jiang is prepared to open a photography studio in Shanghai two years after his graduation of bachelor of graphic design. During the last two years, he was perfunctorily taking English courses as his parents recommended him to, but in fact he invested most of his time on taking passionately film photos and hangout out with band players.

1), *Feiyue*, one of the well-known premier Chinese brands, was very popular during 1950s-1970s. After the Opening-up Policy, however it lost the charms, became the cheap and ugly one used by working class, poor construction workers, elderly women and rural citizens. In 2006, the shoes become popular and trendy in Europe when Feiyue was bought and re-branded by a French company. Now it regains the favours and attentions from many Chinese young people. And when "Feiyue" comes back from Europe, with the price of twenty times (€50: €2.5) as the original one, it appears in expensive shopping malls.

19 June, 2010

In the weekend, Jiang decided to show me the newly-open stores which I had no chance to visit when I was abroad. When we met in the metro station, he arrived as a noticeable boy with colorful garment, who appeared to just walk out of the fashion teenage magazine (see the picture "1st Day").

First he took me to a store exclusively selling *Feiyue*¹⁾ shoes. Originally, *Feiyue* was a local brand, known for its inferior quality and low price before it was rebranded by a French company. The price ranges from ¥30 to ¥50 (€3-€5). Jiang frequents this store and has bought many pairs of shoes for himself and for his friends. Jiang said:

"This is the cheapest price so far that I have ever found. Since the brand becomes popular in Europe, it is sold in a very high price, which I think is crazy. People would like to spend ten times on these shoes now, that they would never think to buy before they are famous in Europe. What a sad and ridiculous story about our own local brand and design!"

These shoes are really well-designed. Look at the shapes and the colors. You should buy one. Don't wear Converse. They are out-of-fashion now. And also, you can buy some for your friends in Finland. Wearing them in Helsinki, you people must be damned fashionable and special. And you know these shoes are very expensive in Europe."

He helped me to choose a pair of shoes with blue lines and asked me to wear them immediately. When I changed to the new Feiyue, Jiang was excited to take out his film camera and took photo of the shoes that he claimed *"extremely trendy and pretty"*.

Then he took me to Mike Café, featuring the vintage interior style, which is, especially popular among young photographers recently. On the way, we saw a vendor, riding slowly a three-wheeled bike forth and back along the street and selling straw hats with the trendy style. Jiang stopped him and asked for the price. When he knew the price was only ¥15, he invited me together to picking up the hats:

"Come! Let us see whether there are good ones. Let me tell you, the hats are of the same quality as the ones sold in brand shops, like Zara. The hat which costs ¥100 in Zara is exactly the same as these in this bike. So never go to brand shops to waste your money."

It is a pity that we did not buy anything because of the size problem.

Situated in a historic building constructed in 1927 in the former French Concession, Mike's Café is a small yet remarkable café with outer wall printed Tiffany blue, the most popular vintage color. Inside, it has been fitted out with wooden floorboards and panels recovered from older homes that have been demolished. All the exotic and old items that Mike gathered from all over the world characterize the Café that is Jiang's favourite one in Shanghai. An old Beatles record, an antique brass ship's clock, a secondhand book offering salacious tidbits on the golden days of Hollywood can be found here. He has taken many friends here. Every time Jiang takes his film camera to take pictures of the vintage objects in the café, like many other customers do who come here for the Café instead of for coffee. He never gets bored because always new items are collected and displayed.

Mike is the owner of the cafe and was a banker for twenty years. After retiring, he traveled nearly forty countries. Finally, he decided to settle down in Shanghai and to open a café where he can exhibit all the vintage objects that he has been collecting. Jiang told me Mike is the kind of person that he dreams to be, who never bows to the conventions and formality, who follows his heart and who is

devoted to what he loves:

"Mike calls himself shabby chic. It is so cool. I want to be him, who has dreams and taste. We should never give up and always be ourselves rather than just another normal person."

By saying that, Jiang became excited and determined in the way which he appeared to be making a solemn pledge.

When we ordered the café, Mike came and asked Jiang:

"Hi, Boy, I heard you play guitar very well. I have the guitar downstairs. It is a nice afternoon. Let us sing!"

Jiang was very happy with the compliment and invitation.

Sitting on the stairs, Mike lit a cigarette and asked Jiang whether he could play *Ba Beishang Liugei Ziji*.

Jiang nodded confidently and then twanged the guitar string.

As I know, Jiang has been constantly practicing acoustic guitar for eight years. Doubtless, he played the song very smoothly and gently with the music perfectly memorized in his mind. Jiang's excellent performance attracted some of the customers who together with Mike asked Jiang to continuously play. When Jiang was not so familiar with the song, he searched the music very efficiently with his iPhone.

After enjoying several songs, Mike seemed to be very satisfied. He invited Jiang and his band to play live in his café next Saturday evening.

Jiang could not believe himself since it was the first time to be invited to perform one month after they form band. He immediately called the other two members and shared news.

In the evening, I came to Jiang's apartment that is filled with numerous items that he constantly purchased in market and online stores. I will introduce and analysis them in details next chapter.

I stayed overnight in Jiang's coach.

20 June, 2010

In the early morning, Jiang woke me up. I was surprised he had already prepared the breakfast: the oatmeal porridge was served in a red-circle patterned ceramics bowl with wood cover; the egg fried carefully with heart shape and one slice of toast was on the plastic plate with pattern of Teddy Bear.

Jiang said he was on a diet and the breakfast featuring the low calories was recommended by a dietitian. For the first time in my life I witness a Chinese man who went on a diet and prepared the low-carb diet by himself, though I heard about some from the magazines.

When we were eating on the coach, Jiang suddenly stared at me:

"Your dress is very beautiful!"

His compliment embarrassed me because it was just a piece of sleep dress simply made by my mother with remnants and I wore it for nearly ten years. Just four days ago, when I went to buy eggs in the grocery shop nearby with the dress, my mother was angry that I did not change to the "proper" clothes for out-of-home. She claimed that I should feel ashamed to walk around with sleep dress. Since Jiang's opposite attitude with my mother, I said:

"But I only wear it at home."

"So what?" Jiang did not see the name "sleep dress" any problematic, *"The flowery pattern is very beautiful. The style is simple but elegant. However, you need a belt I think."*

He put his porridge aside, and took out the belts that he bought. There was about ten of various materials and styles. He picked a brown leather one and asked me to wear. He seemed to be very satisfied with my look:

"It looks beautiful! I will take a lot of pictures for you today. See, one can look very beautiful with the self-made old sleep dress if he or she has the taste; but if one has no taste, he or she will spend ¥1000 on a piece that looks like a cheap sleep dress. What we need is good taste instead of wasting money on brands."

Today, Jiang changed all the garments, even including his iPhone's cover (see the picture "2nd Day"). Jiang took me to an i-Mart²⁾ held weekly in Redtown Sculpture Art Center. The i-Mart is located in a former steel factory, a type of geographic place that is universally favored recently by many events related to design and art. Many design students and young designers sold their hand-made items like ceramics, silver jewelry, notebooks, tees and wooden toys.

Jiang complained the items were not as creative as before, and he found very few interesting things to buy. However he did not find the market boring: he was busy taking pictures of people who he found interesting or unique enough to appear in his film photos. Walking forth and back among the rows of stalls with more than ten photos taken, he finally spent ¥3 on a cotton handkerchief with rabbit pattern, with which he claimed to wipe the sweat. Despite of the perceived use value, the fabric became an important prop later when we posed for photo taking in the sculpture museum. And several days after that visit, I asked Jiang whether he was using the handkerchief still. Jiang was a bit embarrassed:

"No. I guess I lost it after we visited the museum."

The handkerchief is not used to wipe sweat, even not once; but it is taken into photos though its user no longer possesses it. Many objects that Jiang possesses have similar destiny that I will discuss

2), "i-Mart", also called as "creative mart", is a type of market selling creative items designed and made by local designers and artists. I-Mart comes to fashion among Chinese young generations since 2008.

3), Mao LiveHouse is a popular large-sized concert venue, mainly hosting local rock and indie musical acts performed by national bands every weekend and most nights of the weeks.

in details later.

The last place that Jiang took me to is Mao LiveHouse³⁾ where watched local rock band live. There, I saw a group of young people who dressed in a similar way in which Jiang enacted identity with the carefully chosen items. Many people had at least one strikingly unconventional item, garment or accessory. As I observed there, there were grandma style sleep pants, shiny green framed glasses, vintage ear rings, big bow hair decoration and so forth.

In the midnight, we went home.

5.1.1 Being of Jiang

The thick description above is about how Jiang presented himself as a social self through behaviors and identity-related objects in the particular chosen public spaces. As for what impression that Jiang attempts to give to others, one Jiang's assertion could be cited here:

"With good taste, one can look good even with her old sleep dress."

Jiang explicitly expressed his aim that is to show his good taste by looking good at the least expense. The "good taste" here refers to two aspects: one is aesthetic preference that is due to his art education in university; the other is rich brand knowledge that he gains from urban commercial society. In order to achieve the aim, Jiang's main method referring to consumption behavior is to continuously purchase and use cheap and beautiful objects.

To understand why Jiang chooses such method, we should be aware how Jiang perceive other people. This is what Jiang said about his friends and family in the interview:

I hate people with bad taste. My father (who is a successful businessman) spent ¥5000 on a *Prada* nylon bag. It is so ugly, and looks so cheap, just like the worst one from the street vendors. I am speechless. A friend of my father's wears *Gucci* shoes and carries *Gucci* bag. Being such a rural woman, she looks so vulgar with these luxury brands.

What can money alone do? Like my father, though he invests a lot of money, he still looks stupid and vulgar.

Life is ours. I think personal hobby and dream is very important, as well as self-expression. I express myself through the way I look, the songs I sing, the paintings I draw, and the photos I take. One has to live happily, embracing dreams. I bought lots of good-looking garments every year. Many of them are counterfeits that I don't deny. I don't need these luxury brands to express myself.

Most of my school mates are so boring. They

go to work everyday. They have nothing to do in their spare times because they have nothing, like hobby or dream, to cheer them up. They buy ordinary brands like *Jack Jones* just because a lot of other people buy it. They even don't care whether they look good with these garments. They just follow what other people do. They themselves have no idea about who they are. They don't know how to express themselves. They are just *anyone* of the crowds.

Jiang strongly expressed his negative opinion about the consumption behavior pattern of his family and friends who spend lots of money on products purely for the brand names without appreciation of the products. In return, the brand products do not make them look better. The group of people, including his father, is considered no taste and no passion for life. They are the "others" that Jiang desperately strives to be distinctive from. It becomes understandable now that there is an element of strong eager inside Jiang's mind to show his "good taste".

When we know the perceived image and behaviors of the "others", the image of "being Jiang" becomes clear: Jiang perceives himself as a unique young man who has taste, together with romantic and joyful attitude for life. Such value is embodied in his way of purchasing and using products and the identity of his objects.

Based on the strong eager to express the unique "Jiang" and the values embodied with, Jiang uses the calculating way to give the impression to others who will give the response as Jiang expects. In the following chapters, I will discuss the methods and strategies that Jiang chooses to express his identity through the identity-related objects as "expressive props" that are regarded as part of the extended "Jiang" (Belk, 1988). And at the same time, how and why the certain shanzhai product categories, as part of the identity-related objects, are chosen as the expressive props by Jiang to enact his identity will be discussed.

5.1.2 Expressive objects: cheap and beautiful

Having briefly introduced Jiang's identity and values, now I will further explore in details from the perspective of materiality, by analyzing his identity-related objects. Jiang gave me a list of all the products that he purchased in *Taobao*¹⁾ from 2010.1-2011.1. Jiang is a big fan for online shopping. He purchases products at a large extent, from clothes to furniture, from food to light bulbs. I selected all the identity-related items to do the object analysis based on Miller's (1987) Material Culture theory that localizes objects as the extensions of self.

The objects that I analyzed are clothes, shoes, bags, watches, glasses, iPhone and iPad's covers (that are shown in pictures), and other interesting items for daily use. Jiang's identity-related objects are characterized as follows:

- 1), low price: clothes are averagely under ¥100; watches under ¥50; shoes are around ¥100; glasses under ¥30;
- 2), inferior quality: many are plastic;
- 3), high perceived aesthetic level: many have bright colors or cartoon patterns;
- 4), a sense of joyfulness, playfulness and romantics;
- 5), short product cycle and a high level of disposability.

From the characters, I will discuss how these objects express the objectified values and meanings of Jiang about personal and social world (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p132).

1), *Taobao* is the biggest web site for online auction and online shopping in China, similar to eBay. It has more than 370 million registered users as of the end of 2010 and currently hosts more than 800 million product listings.

JIANG'S IPHONE AND IPAD COVERS

Material	most are plastic and rubber
Quality	the ones under ¥30 were usually bad
Visual	most of them had bright colors or artist patterns, of street graffiti style designed by famous designers

Usage | Jiang changed the cover almost everyday, as he claimed, depending on his mood and the style of his whole look. Being fresh is important both for him and his Apple products. For those with unbearably inferior quality, he left them in a box. The low price allowed him to care less about the loss of money, and furthermore, did not discourage him to continue to purchase similar cheap products. Sometimes, he took pictures of these colorful covers, including the unused ones, and posted them on Xiaonei with the title "Look at my iPhone cover family".



5.1.3 New meaning of cheapness

The identity-related objects, garments and accessories have low price on average. Although the contextual meaning of cheapness is generally related to economically inferior status, Jiang interprets it in his own way, even bringing a sense of pride. In the stereotype of the “others” who, in Jiang’s point of view, invest a large amount of money on brand products only for their logos and are not able to appreciate the aesthetic aspect, expensiveness has a negative meaning of blindly buying brand products without taste. In order to differentiate himself from the “others” who are perceived as “no taste”, Jiang tends to avoid purchasing expensive brand products. Instead, through purchasing cheap products, Jiang is claiming his capability of looking good. And such capability that he explicitly conveys is the “good taste”.

We can easily get the message from his methods to provoke the pride due to the cheapness. The story including a set of activities I am going to tell is about how Jiang managed to express his meaning of cheapness.

Besides *Taobao*, Jiang frequents Qipu market is a clothes wholesale market which is featured by 1), a variety of items with low price; 2), universality of counterfeit products of trendy garments. 3), inferior environmental atmosphere. Compared with exquisitely decorated brand stores selling mainstream items, the social identity of these wholesale markets in Shanghai are related to low-class shopping places frequented by economically inferior people, like migrant workers and students, who are commonly regarded as ones with lower standard for quality of life. However, despite of the commonly negative identity of such places in many people’s eyes, Jiang feels proud of shopping in the wholesale markets by bringing his own value and interpretation:

I go to these markets quite often. People may think garments there are cheap and shabby. They are wrong. Actually if you have taste and time, you will find cheap pieces that are as good as the ones sold in expensive brand stores. I have time and taste, so I am capable of wearing desirable garments with less money.

During Spring Festival, in *Xiaonei*¹⁾, Jiang announced that he

1), *Xiaonei* is a Facebook-alike social network in China.

would go to Qipu market to buy new clothes for the new year²⁾. When he was shopping in the market, he took photos of the beautiful pieces by iPhone and posted them on *Xiaonei* at the same time. The description added with the photos included two aspects of his aesthetic comment (for instance, I love *the red stripe pattern that is very beautiful and vintage*) and the price (for instance, *it only costs ¥50*). After purchasing all the garments of his new look for the New Year, he wore them, carefully took good pictures of himself, and posted them in *Xiaonei* to his friends. The title of these pictures is "Look at my new set bought in Qipu market".

2), In Spring Festival, people are traditionally required to wear new clothes that symbolize new things in the new year. And people go to visit all the families and friends with the new set of clothes during the festival.

The message that Jiang attempted to express through the set of behaviors is clear, in the way that he repeated and highlighted the words "Qipu market", "beautiful" and "cheap". He was claiming to his 308 *Xiaonei* friends: "I am capable of looking good with little expense in such a low-class market." And such *capability* is attributed to his *good taste* that is the core of his value and identity expression.

5.1.4 Fast Consumption: a high level of disposability and inferior quality

Jiang uses these wearable products in a high level of disposability. Low price allows him to afford the loss of money. He changes his clothes, accessories and iPhone's covers almost everyday. At the same time he continuously purchases new products. And the time of product cycle is so short that it does not require good quality of the products. Quality matters little for Jiang, while being fresh and beautiful to express his joyful attitude for life matters.

5.1.5 Internet: to look good in photos

The popularity of online social network provides people a new stage for self-expression. Different from the traditional physical space, the identity is expressed in cyber space is through new methods like photos, videos and written texts. People share the photos of the interesting moments in daily lives and their feelings about the personal and social world.

In the case of Jiang who is proud of his good taste, looking good in photos is extremely important for him. Based on the specialty of photos, only the visual aspect is expressed in the

photos. Thus, any beautiful and noticeable objects are qualified to appear Jiang's photos. It means that the visual part is the only requirement when function and quality can be fully ignored. For instance, if Jiang bought a piece of beautiful garment that is of very bad quality (this situation actually happens often), he would wear it and take good photos. Once the attractive photos were posted online, the usage of the piece is achieved and it would be disposed. From Jiang's way of usage, we can learn that cyber space creates a new world for cheap and beautiful objects that are frequently bought by Jiang though he never wears them in public spaces.

5.1.6 Jiang and shanzhai

Counterfeit products of fashionable and trendy brands, as one shanzhai product category, are part of Jiang's expressive objects that are characterized by the low price and desirable aesthetic attribute, and that are used in a high level of disposability.



Jiang, a young man born in a coastal commercial city, is influenced by the western consumer culture and actively accepts the idea that consumption and commercial objects are the expressive props to express the ideal self. Therefore, when some people express themselves through work or family, Jiang is fascinated with the method of consumption to show his good taste, and joyful and romantic attitude for life. The pattern of his consumption behavior is to continuously purchase cheap and beautiful wearable objects and to use them in a high level of disposability. And unlike many people who are busy in work, Jiang, as a freelance photographer, has adequate spare time to seek favorable products in market and online.

Using counterfeit products does not bring him shame at all. Jiang chooses to purchase the counterfeit one even though he is able to afford the authentic one. The symbolic value of brands does not help him for identity expression at all. Contrarily, when the "others" purchase products for the brand name, Jiang intends to avoid the influence of brand name to claim his independent appreciation of the visual attributes of the products.

What should be noted is that all the "cheap and beautiful" objects refer to the ones without technology. As for the electronic

gadgets with technical functions, Jiang highly values the quality and functions in the professional perspectives. Jiang cannot bear the poor quality of these shanzhai electronic products like slow speed, shabby UI, low pixel of image, poor quality of sound and so forth.

	name	YANG X.	
	age	23	
	Edu.	high school	
	B.P.	WY(remote village)	
	L.P.	TX(coastal small city)	
	career	barber	
	income	¥2000/m	
	Rlat.status	single	
	father	farmer	
shanzhai products cheap ones			
way of use use value			
shanzhai is cheap/bad quality/non-brand			
pride hardworking			
			

	name	DING H.L.	
	age	39	
	Edu.	primary school	
	B.P.	HA(coastal village)	
	L.P.	TX(coastal small city)	
	career	rural entrepreneur	
	income	¥20000/m	
	Rlat.status	married	
	father	farmer	
shanzhai products cheap ones			
way of use use value			
shanzhai is cheap/bad quality/non-brand			
pride family			
			

Cheap objects in their frugal lives with a lack of sense of brand

5.2.1 Being of Yang

Although at the similar age of Jiang, unlike Jiang, Yang was not born in a coastal city; he does not have a rich father; he has very poor perception of brands and has limit brand knowledge; he has no university or art education; he has little time for shopping; he does not know the idea of self-expression.

At his seventeen years old, Yang left his poor remote village and went to Shanghai to look for a job. After seven years, now he works fifteen hours per day as a barber in a hair salon in a coastal city near Shanghai. He has only two-day holiday every month. He seldom goes out to socializing with his friends. During the negligible spare time, he takes a rest in dorm and watch TV. He earns around ¥2000 per month that he saves almost half for opening own hair salon in the future.

Yang who persists the traditional Chinese value of frugality is a price-sensitive consumer who takes low price as the priority. Little influenced by western consumption culture, he is a lack of sense of brand and with little knowledge about the fundamental logic of business concepts from the west. And for him the concept "brand" is related to higher social and economic status. Therefore, in most of the cases, Yang unknowingly purchases counterfeit products with brand logos. However, if he happens to learn the symbolic value of the brand name, he will be glad that he only spends a fraction of the original money to bring the logo to his life.

In the following chapter, I will discuss two aspects that influence Yang's consumption behaviors.

5.2.2 Frugal living ethic

Having suffering the poverty, Yang is struggling for a better-off life. Frugality, one of traditional Chinese values, persists deeply in his mind. In the terms of consumption, Yang is a price-sensitive consumer who appreciates and practices the traditional value of frugality in everyday life. Being little influenced by western consumption culture, he relates the possessiveness neither to the essence of their satisfaction or well-being, nor to their identity expression.

He only purchases goods that he perceives as “economical and practical” for basic material life. Yang only asks two questions when he is purchasing merchandises for his own use: “is it cheap” and “will it last long”. His process of decision-making during purchasing cannot be simpler, as it is only consisted of two attributes: price and quality.

The price, however, enjoys the priority. The products should be kept as cheap as possible. Low price occupies the unshakably primary position in his mind. The advantage of lower price is always beyond doubt even with the sacrifice of quality. I will show our dialogue about mobile phone as an example in the interview.

Interviewer: Do you know there are some mobile phones that copy *Nokia* (*Nokia* is the only mobile phone brand that he knows)?

Yang: (for 5 seconds)

Hmm, I don't know. Maybe (there are).

Interviewer: Then usually they are cheaper than *Nokia*. How do you think?

Yang: Well, I heard some people say that it is not good to copy. But for me, if brand A copies brand B, and A product is cheaper than B product, it is very good.

Interviewer: So as long as the price is cheaper, you think copy doesn't matter?

Yang: Yes, low price is a good thing. The cheaper, the better.

Interviewer: Then if the cheaper ones have worse quality?

Yang: Hmm, of course quality shouldn't be too

bad. Maybe it is not a nice thing that you buy a mobile phone and it breaks very soon.

For Yang, cheapness that is related to being economical leads to less expenditure and more savings. And the aesthetic aspect of the product that is the priority for Jiang plays an insignificant role for Yang.

5.2.3 Lack of sense of brand and product knowledge

When Jiang expertly adopts consumption to enact his identity, Yang is still an “alien” in the commercial society due to his inadequate knowledge of certain product categories and the commercial concepts like intelligent property rights, copyright infringement and brand identity.

Yang was born in a rural family in a remote village and has been working in coastal city as a migrant worker after his graduation from high school. He is in his early development of the sense of brand. Furthermore, he has little chance to learn the knowledge about products that are not traditionally common for him, like high-tech products.

When China was in the stage of Planned Economy, there was no sense of brand when all the products were sold exclusively by the State. Very limited alternatives available made consumers few opportunities to choose. Through the process of modernization since Opening-up policy though, as he lived in a village far away from coastal area, he has little chance to be influenced by western consumption culture. Unlike the urban young generation, such as Jiang, who are receiving commercial brand education during their waking hours, the idea of brand is still new for Yang. Faced with unprecedentedly plentiful commodities and brands, Yang gets lost owing to the lack of adequate knowledge.

His lack of knowledge is obviously revealed in the interview. I asked him to compare the *Nokia* mobile phone that he is using, with the *CECT* one that I provided and the shanzhai one that he used before. Surprisingly he was not capable of comparing the three mobile phones in terms of size, color, material, shape, weight, keyboards or UI. However he could tell in terms of functionality that which one could play music, and which one

can store more photos. We can suppose that, though not explicitly expressed in his accounts, Yang's little knowledge about mobile phones makes him difficult to choose one product among the variety of alternatives in the market alone.

Besides the product knowledge, the commercial concepts are also new to him. Let us go back to my dialogue with Yang above. Yang was very confused when I asked issues concerning copy. I was encountered with the same problem when I interviewed another respondent Ding, who is a middle-aged woman from rural area. When I asked them about issues that are relate to copyright infringement, IP laws, trademarks, or brand identity. They were looking at me, confused. They could say nothing because they had no idea.

Being blind to these western concepts, Yang, as well as Ding, is identified as "inexperience consumer" or "alien" in the contemporary market context.

5.2.4 Yang & Ding and shanzhai

The shanzhai products that Yang has bought are listed below:

- 1), a shanzhai *Nokia* mobile phone;
- 2), five counterfeit *Converse* shoes;
- 3), several pieces of garments with brand logos, like *Kappa* and *Adidas*;
- 4), a counterfeit *CK* bag and some *CK* underwear.

Yang may purchase Quarter, Crescent and New Category, when he is attracted by the low price of the products. In many cases that Yang unknowingly purchases shanzhai products due to his inadequate brand knowledge. It is also possible that he wittingly purchase shanzhai ones when he realizes the symbolic value of the certain brands. I will show one example about how Yang bought and used a counterfeit *CK* bag:

That day, I went to a shop for a bag.

The salesgirl pointed at a black bag: "This bag is a *CK* counterfeit one. *CK* is big brand. "

She started to tell me the brand was from US, how expensive and luxury it was, and how crazy that many rich fashionable urban people were about the brand.

Well, since it's a big brand, I decided to buy it. It was ¥60. And the bag was quite good-looking, I think.

Then later, his shanzhai *CK* bag caused the positive attention from his friends which brought him a feeling of contentment.

Once I went out with my friends.

One of my friends saw the *CK* logo in my bag, and shouted: "Wow, you are great now! You are rich now! You bought *CK*, dude!"

I was very proud actually, but I pretended to be very calm: "No, it is a fake. I only paid ¥60."

He didn't stop: "You kidding, dude? Are you sure it is not real? Anyway, your bag is *CK*! Amazing..."

I was happy. I didn't know I would get so much attention.

The story of Yang and his shanzhai *CK* bag is not exceptional. Ding was encountered the same reaction from her friends after

she bought a counterfeit *Applter* brand tee, unknowingly though.

Once I bought a tee for my husband.

The next day our neighbor saw it and said: "Wow, look at you, how great you are. You are wearing brand now."

Then I explained: "No, it is not. It only costs ¥50."

But none believed us, because we are rich.

Then I realized it was shanzhai, though I didn't know when I bought it. I am not interested in visiting the *Applter* shop to check or to buy the authentic ones. But I was just very happy because I took the advantage of price.

The presence of the brand logos in their lives brings them positive identity-related appraisals from their friends who belong to the same social community. Their friends responded so because the logos, in their eyes, represent the identity of higher social class and facilitate enacting the identity of a better, or ideally unreal, self of Yang or Ding. And in turn such rewarding appraisals, that confirm and support the identity performance, will make people like Yang and Ding more confident and joyful in exercising such behavior (Kleine, Klaine & Kernan, 1993). Whether the logos are authentic or not has limited influence on their identity performance here, because solely the symbolic value is known by the "alien" consumers like Yang and Ding.

And, what, exactly, does the new language of "brand" mean to them?

Yang claimed:

For me, Brand means expensive.

And they are consumed by rich people.

I don't have money now. Brand products are too expensive for me now.

One day when I am rich, I will buy them. It is called self-satisfaction.

Ding, the rural entrepreneur, claimed:

Brands are the expensive ones, and are sold in beautiful shops.

Brands look classy (or high-class). When people have them, people look better.

For both Yang and Ding, brands, concerning high price, are closely related to people who have higher economic and social status. There is also a strong element of the status-defining role that brands plays in their accounts. In all, it is clear here that brand is about something of the higher class than them.

People who appreciate the traditional value of frugality, like Yang and Ding, are humble consumers who spend money carefully, and regard brand, which is not part of their lives yet, as something far away to reach and pursuit.

	name	HU X.G.
	age	28
	Edu.	Bachelor of Sc.
	B.P.	AY(inland city)
	L.P.	Shanghai
	career	manager
	income	¥13000/m
	Rlat.status	in a Rlat.
	father	professor
	shanzhai products exquisite and expensive ones	
way of use low level of disposability		
shanzhai is vulgar grassroots design		
pride high social status		
		

	name	JIN Z.H.
	age	35
	Edu.	high school
	B.P.	HN(small coastal city)
	L.P.	HN(small coastal city)
	career	shop owner
	income	¥8000/m
	Rlat.status	married
	father	factory worker
	shanzhai products exquisite and expensive ones	
way of use using for years		
shanzhai is cheap/bad quality		
pride taste of life		
		

Expensive and exquisite objects to show high social status

5.3.1 Being of Jin and Hu

At her mid-thirties, Jin has her own leather business. At his late-twenties, Hu is a senior client manager in a company. When they work in business with clients, they need to market themselves as skilled and educated professionals; when they socialize with their friends, they treat themselves as classy ones. They both regard themselves as ones who have higher economic status than other people, and appreciate the taste and quality of life.

They both are aware of the status-defining role of brands. So they shop particular brands in well-decorated shopping malls and claim explicitly that messy markets are not for them. From the interviews, how they use brands to express their identities can be clearly shown:

Hu: I only shop in the shopping malls. I don't like these messy and dirty markets or these vulgar national fashion brands. My style is simple and elegant. I dare to say I look good among all my friends. I look very handsome with *G-star* which is a Nordic jeans brand. I love *Prada's* design. The details of *Diesel* are excellent. I always love Italian brands. *Montblanc* and *Hugo Boss* are exquisite. Sometimes *D&G* has sexy and elegant garments. I never buy *H&M*, *Levis* or *Kappa* because everyone wears them. Yes, I don't like to wear the same as others.

Jin: I only buy brands because they are of good quality. Unlike other women, I am not interested in trendy and cheap garments. I need classic. I have my favored brands, like *Manyanu*, *Omega*, *Feini*, *Luskin*, and *Dior Perfume*.

They both use brands to distinct themselves from other people around them. These brands they mentioned were all perceived as expensive and classy though according to the brand knowledge, Hu listed all western brands and Jin listed some national ones.

5.3.2 Jin & Hu and shanzhai

When Jin and Hu need some particular brands to show their economic status, aesthetic preferences and brand knowledge, one shanzhai product category is selected as part of their expressive objects. It is the delicate replicas of luxury brands that are expensive, exquisitely made and imprinted with loud logos.

Luxury brands are defined as “a modern set of symbols” of high social position by Chadha and Husband (2006, p4). Their adequate brand knowledge enables them to be aware of the luxury brands that Hu and Jin cannot financially afford symbolize higher social position than theirs.

The meaning of the logos of counterfeit products for Jin and Hu is similar with the one for Yang. However, unlike Yang, Jin and Hu's adequate brand and product knowledge lead to a different way of usage and of rationalization of their shanzhai behaviors.

Jin has an A-replica of *Chanel* purse (¥250) and one of *Prada* canvas bag (¥800). The *Chanel* one is a simple black one made of good leather. The purse has been used for four years and still keeps a very good condition. Jin bought the shanzhai *Prada* bag one year ago and carries it everyday. Every time when she takes bus, she carefully puts her *Prada* bag into a big plastic bag to avoid any dust.

Hu has several A-replicas of *Prada* and *Armani* jeans that are simple in style and good in quality. He wears them to work and to socialize in everyday life.

Unlike Jiang who uses cheap counterfeit products with a high level of disposability, they use the expensive A-replicas as carefully as they do to classic and precious pieces.

Although Jin and Hu purchase A-replicas of luxury brands, they deny the influence of the brand name. Instead, they claim they purchase them because of their capability of appreciating the exquisite piece itself. They think they are “wise and educated” consumers compared with the “parvenus” who blindly invest a large amount of money on luxury brands merely for the loud logo. The “parvenus” are mentioned in Jiang's chapter as well. They mainly refer to the newly rich people rising from modest social background wear loud western logos to show their considerable financial powers and to achieve social esteem. And they are tagged

as plebeian ones due to the stupid method to show off. The existence of “parvenus” brings an exotic identity to the luxury consumption in Chinese context which makes the discourse complex. For people like Jiang, Jin and Hu, the identity of explicitly wearing logos is closely related to the unbearably plebeian manner of “parvenus”.

Therefore, Jin and Hu portray themselves as ones with rationality, smartness, sophistication and taste instead of the cult of luxury attributed to “parvenus”. Jin expressed her “pride” involved in her shanzhai behaviors:

If I want, I can afford the real one which costs ¥10000 (her A-replica costs ¥800). It is just stupid to invest so much money on a bag. Since the original one and the fake one are exactly the same, of course I will choose the cheap one. Once I heard the news that there are fake bags in the real LV store, too. You see. I am not these parvenus who only buy the logo but know nothing about the quality.

I don't feel embarrassed with my fake bag when I go out with people who carry the real ones. By contrast I feel proud that I spend 10% money on the exact one. Theirs and mines are the same.

Once, one of my friends bought a real LV purse which was ¥7000. She took the purse to my shop. And I just had the A-replica of that one. We compared the two and we find out no nuance. She was so regretful.

Jin's pride lies on not only her price consciousness purchase behavior but also her capability of appreciating the product value of the piece, such as cut, material and design. She mentioned through the interviews many times the difference between her and the “parvenus”.

Yang, who is a humble consumer with little brand and product knowledge, admits the influence of brand name during his shanzhai purchase. While Jin and Hu desperately deny that they are influenced by the symbolic value of logos. Compared with perceived socially inferior people, they skillfully select some affordably expensive brands to enact the social identity of high economic status and aesthetic taste. When they cannot afford the

luxury brands, they purchase the cheaper A-replicas with good quality to achieve the status value. However, as status conscious they are, they do not allow any negative image associated with their shanzhai behaviors. Therefore, they portray themselves culturally superior than the ones who are economically superior.

When Jin and Hu were explaining their shanzhai behaviors, I find a tortured sense of self-gratification. Clearly, they hold the pride that they are socially high-ranking in Chinese society. And they desperately keep the sense of pride from both authentic brands and A-replicas of luxury brands although they know that such shanzhai behavior is regarded negatively in public's view.

CHAPTER SIX

**ETHICAL
CONSIDERATIONS**

The most interesting claims people make are
those they make about themselves.

-Clyde Kluchhon (1944)

Shanzhai products have been widely recognized as a growing social and economic problem for both genuine producers and policy makers. We are not unfamiliar with the criticisms that shanzhai products and activities bear and reported damage they cause. It is considered as both illegal and unethical for copyright infringement, outrageous plagiarisms, and disrespect for intellectual properties of others. A pile of statistics are provided by many official institutes, like anti counterfeiting coalitions, public news journals, trade representatives and governmental press, as evidence to prove the serious industry loss- numerous properties in lost sales, taxes and jobs- due to shanzhai products.

And in the other side, the shanzhai users perceive shanzhai products in another perspective, which leads to different opinions and attitudes. In their everyday life, they choose products to purchase according to their needs and criteria. While within the social order and dominant views impressed on them, they seek the balance between their shanzhai practices and the system from within. They tactically resist or challenge the imposed ethical model, which embodies the accounts from the nine shanzhai users in my interviews are used to rationalize their shanzhai purchases. They display their ethical considerations of shanzhai products in their own ways, which are independently articulated of the dominant views, from various aspects concerning consumers themselves, branding and IP laws in the economic environment, social context, and temporal factors.

6.1 Needs of Consumer

It is commonly known that the need from a large amount of Chinese consumers primarily contribute to the popularity of shanzhai products in China. Needless to say, shanzhai products- either by selling at a fraction of the original price with the equivalent quality, or by offering more functions or more desirable appearance under the same price- are beneficial for consumers. Such benefits are widely demonstrated by many stories about shanzhai purchases told by my respondents in the interviews. Yang, the barber from rural area, gave us a simple example with clear logic to clarify such benefit that shanzhai products bring to consumers:

Shanzhai products are definitely beneficial for Chinese consumers. For instance, if a pair of shanzhai shoes only sells ¥60 while the original pair sells ¥300. Then you can get five similar pairs with the same amount of money. Isn't it great?

Not only are consumers aware of the benefits, they skillfully choose *need of consumers* as the most effective and persuasive means to argue their positive attitudes toward the existence of shanzhai products in China.

Here is the story of her purchase of shanzhai books told by Zhang LY, the 23-year-old girl who just works for one year:

Zhang: Last year, I bought the pirated books online with ¥60. It's learning material, with three books. Though the quality was bad, the content was the same. I used them for the preparation for the exam.

Interviewer: Why not buy the authentic ones?

Zhang: Why should I? They cost ¥180, which is too expensive. It is unethical.

Interviewer: You mean the price of ¥180 is unethical?

Zhang: It is just too expensive for me. I used those books only for a few months. I don't think it is necessary to buy the expensive ones.

Interviewer: Is it legal to buy pirated books?

Zhang: I don't think my behavior is illegal, because the original price is too expensive. Maybe (it is) not ethical, after all it is economical and practical for consumers. En... (pausing for 5 seconds), life is always in dilemma, isn't it?

Zhang was telling her experience of buying pirated books with great confidence. She explicitly expressed her determined support for this purchase even by questioning the necessity of buying authentic books. According to her own criteria of ethical judgment, the fixed price set by the publisher, which is too expensive for her, surprisingly becomes "unethical". When asked about the law consideration, Zhang attempted to absolve herself from the blame by partially shifting the responsibility to the high price of authentic books.

There is a further example that will help us to gain richer picture of how consumers perceive their needs as the excuse to justify their shanzhai behaviors. Jiang, the young photographer in Shanghai, who buys piles of counterfeit trendy garments, holds the same attitude as Zhang:

Jiang: I buy many replicas of these trendy fashion brands. They are all about fast fashion, so there is no need to buy the real and expensive ones. What is the point if I spend ¥1000 on a pair of pants that I only wear for this season? As a consumer, I only want better-looking products with less money. Can't I? Is it wrong? Is it immoral? I use my own money. I don't steal or rob.

Interviewer: Have you thought about the loss of the imitated brands?

Jiang: Some larger issues, like industrial development, IPR, environmental protection, are too far away from us, as individuals. If I am the brand myself, of course I don't want my products to be copied. Anyway people are selfish.

Jiang's confident rhetorical question "is it wrong...is it

immoral" is based on the premise of the perceived normalcy of consumer needs. It is not inappropriate when one longs for commodities for own use, like more sneakers, tees with more beautiful patterns or new bags for each month. Once consumers start to believe that their needs are necessary, innocent and nondestructive, it is difficult for them to disfavor or reject the existence of such products that do well to meet their needs.

However both Zhang and Jiang switched their attitudes when talking about the interests of others, such as brands, society and industry. Their voices lowed and their words blurred. They forced out the obscure answers that sounded philosophical: "life is always in dilemma" and "anyway people are selfish".

Philosophical discussion is not included in the scope of my work. But what is important to us is that their assertions, in this context, reveals that when the interests of consumers contradict the ones of others, they are determined to selfishly stand by the side of their own without caring about others at all. The most notable social issues, which are related to the unethical aspects of shanzhai products that have been widely criticized, are reduced by Jiang merely as "larger issues far away" that he has no concern with.

In my interviews with shanzhai users, each story of shanzhai purchase was followed with a question "is it legal or illegal". When my respondents answered "it is illegal" that constitutes the majority, I asked them to explain why they bought or supported shanzhai products if they perceived them as illegal. Their answers can be represented by one sentence that appeared many times:

as long as consumers need

"as long as" may not be the most precise English translation for their original Chinese expression "只要(zhi yao)", which means the only essential and necessary condition. Such conditional conjunction used by shanzhai users suggests that the *needs of consumers* are the only essential condition to prove the necessity of the existence of shanzhai products. Once the only essential condition is satisfied, all other insignificant ones remains neglected, or there are no other ones to be considered at all for shanzhai consumers.

Users' accounts reveal two main points:

1), the adequacy of *need of consumers* as the justification to

rationalize users' shanzhai behaviors;

2), other considerations, like ethics and law, remain insignificant and are rarely taken into considerations by shanzhai consumers compared with their own needs and interests.

6.2 Ubiquity of Shanzhai Products

When you visit any flea market in cities or villages in China, you will be impressed by the variety of cheap merchandises with explicit famous western brand logos. A corner is piled with hundreds of plastic ladies' shoes with big *Chanel* logos; rows of white tees are printed with various brand logos; the counterfeit versions of the trendy garments in fashion magazines are displayed in the shop front. When you are walking in the street, you will run into one bag with *LV* patterns every ten minutes; you will hear loud music from *Nokia*-like mobile phones now and then.

The ubiquity of shanzhai products in Chinese markets and people's everyday life facilitate normalizing the abnormality of shanzhai products. First, the popularity of shanzhai products in the social context reduces the ethical responsibility of shanzhai users who tend to portray their shanzhai activities as normal. Second, the sensitiveness of shanzhai products as a controversial topic decays. And when shanzhai products are common in the market, insiders have developed their own criteria of choosing merchandise among authentic and shanzhai ones.

6.2.1 Making deviant activities normal

The word "everywhere" was frequently used to describe shanzhai products by my respondents. Here are the dialogues from Wang YY, a frequent shanzhai buyer.

Interviewer: We are going to talk about shanzhai phenomenon in China.

WangYY: (immediately) Ah, it is very common. Shanzhai is everywhere in China. Everyone uses it, almost. I dare to say, at least 70% of the girls carry shanzhai bags, 80% of middle-aged and old generations use shanzhai mobile phones; almost 80-90% of high school students are using shanzhai mobile phones.

Interviewer: Tell me your first shanzhai bag.

WangYY: When I studied in university in Hangzhou

in 2005, shanzhai *Gucci* and *LV* bags were very popular. That year, these fake bags were everywhere, especially the *Gucci* classic one. (They were) in every shop and every corner of the market. At that time, they were just everywhere. You know, these shanzhai bags were everywhere, around you. Whenever you went, they came to your views. As a consumer, I just wanted to buy one to try, just as everyone else did. Many of my friends bought, too. And no one asked, and no one cared. Anyway we all knew none was real.

WangYY tried very hard to stress on the situational influences, with very limited vocabulary though. By repeating the word "everywhere", she attempted to inform me that shanzhai products are inescapable in China. Her account partly suggests the boarder environment of shanzhai products, also portrays herself as an individual who is affected by the normative interpersonal influence in a particular given situation, rather than a positive consumer with aggressive motivation and intention (Bearden, 1989). One feels more comfortable and less stressful to purchase and use shanzhai products in an environment where such activities are common. Jiang, the photographer told me that he did not care to wear shanzhai products.

Nowadays who cares if you wear or use shanzhai products? No one will notice, because they don't care. It is just too common. Everyone uses. There are so many *LV* bags in the street. How many of them are real? I guess few. For instance I am wearing shanzhai *Nike* Dunk SB. It is the limited edition by a Japanese trendy designer. I see a lot of people wearing them in China. All are shanzhai, because they only sell in Japan. I don't care at all wearing shanzhai garments. We all wear them

Here is another story from one shanzhai user from *douban.com*:

I bought a pair of shanzhai *Crocs* clogs with ¥30. The same style sells everywhere, even in Carrefour. In my school, the shoes are seen everywhere. In the beginning when I bought them, I thought maybe it was not appropriate. Later I saw more and more people wearing shanzhai pairs. Then I think it is nothing. Frankly, why spend ¥400 on a pair of slippers?

There are a pile of illustrations of cases about how situational influences affect attitudes, norms and values of shanzhai users. I cite three above which I believe are adequate. Individuals are more likely to exhibit illicit behaviors in a social situation where certain corrupt acts are tolerated and accepted (Albers-Millers, 1999; Conger, 1980). In the particular Chinese context, when many people use shanzhai products, shanzhai activities that are perceived as deviant become normal. There is tendency that deviant acts are regarded less illegal and unethical by insiders. Here is the process how Zhang decided to define shanzhai products as legal:

If it is illegal, then why shanzhai products are everywhere? So I think it is legal.

Taken together, in China where shanzhai products are pervasive, shanzhai activities are highly accepted and tolerated. And the environment in turn does not discourage Chinese people to purchase or use shanzhai products. And ethical considerations are less and less taken into account by insiders who are not as sensitive with the unethical aspects of shanzhai products as outsiders do.

6.2.2 As alternatives in markets

When the problematic parts- pirated brand logo, or similar appearance with authentic ones- decay, the identity as a product generally outlasts one as being shanzhai.

In these circumstances, due to their years of experience, insiders have developed the sophisticated decision-making

model to choose merchandises in the market when authentic and shanzhai products coexist. They consider the practical attributes (like quality and function), visual attributes, symbolic values, price and the usage situations associated with. For instance, whether to buy the genuine or shanzhai *UGG* shoes, one has to compare the price and perceived usage time, in order to choose the *better* one which is appropriate for identity expression and at the same time to get the maximized value of money. The experienced purchasers know exactly when to buy what shanzhai and when not, and when and how to use them.

6.3 Questioning the Fundamental Logic of Business World

Shanzhai products appear in the time when the world is dominated by brand corporations. They set up the rules of game to achieve their profits and protect their asset. And meanwhile government takes actions that have perfected the rules in order to promote commerce and gain profit (Blumenthal, 2005). These rules aim to enable brands to exist and prosper, and to diminish and punish any harmful ones like shanzhai products. Just like one of my respondents WangJ claimed about the commercial society with two Chinese old sayings:

There are two boats in the river:
one is fame, the other is fortune.
江上两条船，一条为名，一条为利

Men die in pursuit of wealth,
and birds die in pursuit of food.
人为财死，鸟为食亡

For shanzhai users, when they rationalize their behaviors regarded as deviant according to the rules established by brand corporations, they started to question the fundamental logic of contemporary business society from two aspects of brand strategy and IP laws.

6.3.1 Brand strategy: trick and performance

With design copied, trademark pirated, symbolic value diminished and brand equity diluted, brand companies have been constantly enduring enormous losses with limited protection from intellectual property rights laws (Zhou & Hui, 2003). The popularity of shanzhai products are the roots of such misfortune.

Sadly such misfortune fails to arouse sympathy from shanzhai users for the victims. On the contrary, two main negative opinions about brands are heard from users. Firstly brand strategies are criticized by some users as tricks played on consumers in order to gain maximized profits. Secondly, users criticize the too high price of the brand products when they are not willing to pay much extra non-product fees like

advertisement, service, brand value, besides the tangible fee of product.

Regarding the first criticism, some of them think it is not fair that brand companies, who themselves play tricks and cheat consumers, ask for justice by accusing shanzhai products of infringement and plagiarism. The tricks in question are mainly about the brand strategies that brand companies practice to build brand images and create symbolic values, and about the means-protection of copyrights, logo, brand- in which global companies monopolize the market and gain exorbitant profits.

Wang Jia, who has IT business major, explicitly blamed the contradictions between the glorious image put forth by the brand and the inglorious means they use on back stage.

I'm anarchist. I never believe what government and brands say or show, maybe because I have heard and seen too many dirty things that they have done. Don't tell me shanzhai activities are cheap and unethical. Brands do dirty things, too.

The famous milk scandal in 2008 is an example. The melamine-tainted milk products caused six kids die and around 300,000 became ill. In the beginning, a few cases of ill kids were reported. Then the spokesman of *Sanlu* declared that their melamine-contained level was safe. Later we all know that *Sanlu* lied shamelessly. *Sanlu* was the arch-criminal.

I heard about *Sanlu* when I was a kid. At that time, everyone thought *Sanlu* was trustworthy and their products were good and safe. But this is what brand is doing. How can I trust it? All is fake.

Anyway, branding is just a show. No matter how great things they say about themselves, it is all about the performance they plan to show us. I don't believe them. I don't buy their stories. All they want is profit.

WangJ chose the most immoral thing that the Chinese milk producer has done to illustrate the irresponsibility of brands. Such single extreme case however is far away from being persuasive to demonstrate that other brands do "dirty things" as well. But from the case of *Sanlu*, the emotion that WangJ

involved in the story is unfolded. The brand that he had trusted as a hero since childhood finally is found out to be the villain who produced toxic milk. He started to learn to be apathetic toward the symbolic value of the brands. He started to doubt the invisible strategies that brands hide in the back stage while they deliberately exhibit the performance in the front stage. The glorious brand names, like *Chanel* or *LV*, that a large amount of women go wild about are nothing but the effect of the successful performances for WangJ.

His perception of brands directly influences his attitude toward shanzhai products. By virtue of his distrust of brands, compared with shanzhai activities, brands do no better things. Both seek fortune with different ways.

I am not against shanzhai products. I don't buy products for the brand name. These brand names mean nothing for me. So I buy a product only for its good quality and reasonable price. I will buy either authentic *Nike* shoes or shanzhai pair, as long as they are comfortable.

The failure of establishment of the brand images positively influences the supportive opinion from users of shanzhai products. Moreover when users complain that brands charge too much premium on the products, they will not reject to purchase counterfeit products that are more economical.

We live in a commercial world where all the brand products have their own fixed prices based on the marketing strategies, production costs and other rules. Users gradually accept the reality that a pair of *Nike* sneakers costs ¥600, a high-class *Nokia* handset costs ¥3000, a pair of Lee jeans costs ¥1000, and a *Gucci* bag costs ¥20000. The price fluctuates very modestly only in sales season or in tax free shops. However the emergence of shanzhai products changes it. Compared with the much lower price of counterfeit products, users start to believe the unequal high fee that they pay for the brand products. Lin chooses to buy shanzhai mobile phones based on the reason as follows:

Before, I used to consider the price of big brand mobile phones reasonable because I think they are

hi-tech products that R&D and materials must be expensive. However I am shocked to see the low price of shanzhai mobile phones. Suddenly I realize that how much premium big brands have charged on the products. If I have the chance to enjoy technologies with lower price, why not?

As I introduced before, the low price of shanzhai mobile phones is mainly contributed by the MTK chips leading to the integration of many functions without R&D costs. Although users know that brand companies invest a large amount of money on R&D and brand building, they are reluctant to share the fee with the companies. Hu who bought lots of counterfeit jeans only wants to pay the fee based on the production cost of the product:

I buy a lot of counterfeit jeans online. They are well-made and well-designed. The price for each is around ¥200. I myself think this price is reasonable. Usually the production cost is less than ¥80. So I can accept that I pay ¥200 on this garment. Nowadays the price of the brand jeans is unreasonably high, usually around ¥1000. These brands are crazy. Their products are not at all worthy of that price.

Since there're cheaper shanzhai ones available, I will not buy the authentic ones. To buy a brand one, you have to pay everything, including all fees of advertisement, store renting, store decoration, service, etc. So 90% of the price is comprised of these extra invisible fees. Why a consumer has to pay so much?

As we know shanzhai is somehow a shortcut. It takes advantage of certain brand, without any actual investments of time and money on R&D, design or image building. However from the perspective of consumers, when the symbolic value and visual attributes are similar, the lower price is very advantageous. They choose to neglect the hypothetical reality that without the huge cost having been invested by branded companies, the final tangible products and the symbolic value associated with them do not exist. Nor do the counterfeit products. Clearly for

1), Such attitudes will be analyzed in "Strategy and Tactics in Shanzhai Users"

consumers, they enjoy the profit from the visual and symbolic values but they are not willing to pay for it¹⁾. Once the cheaper counterfeit products are available, they will choose the beneficial one.

The question whether, as some consumers complain, brands charge too high premium on their products is excluded in the scope of my work. What has been illustrated here is that consumers are not willing to pay the margins that the certain brands set. And counterfeit products fulfill their wishes.

6.3.2 IP Law: a western concept for monopoly

Some movements about free culture and the loosening of copyright restrictions are under way. Some information can be found in <http://creativecommons.org>

Intellectual protection law is intended to protect the rights of those who create original works and to encourage new technologies, artistic expressions and inventions while promoting economic growth. And shanzhai products are viewed as copyright infringement and as disrespecting the intellectual activities of others. But at the same time, in China some different voices are heard, both from shanzhai users and scholars. From non-western viewpoint, in the large west-dominated global economic environment, some Chinese people consider IP laws as one of the weapons that capitalist countries use to protect their profits.

I will take WangJ as the example again. Besides his doubt of brand strategies, his discontentment and intolerance of the monopoly leads him to question the copyright infringement that shanzhai products are accused of. He told me how *Monsanto*, a multinational agricultural biotechnology corporation, exploit farmers by the means of patent protection. *Monsanto* provides the technology in 90% of the world's GE (genetically engineered) seeds (2008).

Monsanto is a single company with monopoly control over soya crops worldwide. Because of its exclusive monopoly, *Monsanto* controls the soybean markets in many countries, including Argentina, China, and India, which in turn brings enormous profits by selling their patents to local farmers. I really want to question the ethics of intellectual property. Farmers have to pay unreasonably high price to grow crops,

cottons and soya beans. It is ruthless exploitation, in sheep's clothing of protecting intellectual properties. Do you think such immoral and inhuman behaviors are much nobler than shanzhai? Absolutely not.

We are in the Vanity Fair. An old Chinese saying goes:

The winner takes it all;
losers are always in the wrong.
胜者为王，败者为寇

IPR laws are the approach that the winners use to monopolize the world.

Like *Sanlu* milk scandal, another extreme case that WangJ used to criticize patent protection is not persuasive either. His argument about IPR laws may not be correct or impartial. Right or wrong, biased or unbiased, such accounts display vividly, however, subject's negative perception of IP laws.

Wang Yuesheng, a Chinese economist in Beijing University, states that the law of copyright protection is not unquestionable. Nowadays all the rules and laws concerning both production and consumption of material and immaterial resources are established and developed by western capitalists, the dominant roles, according to their interests, as well as value and moral system (Wang, 2010). And such rules that are intended to protect one certain party cannot be equal to all. The 2009 Auction of *Old Summer Palace Bronze Heads* in Paris is opposed by many Chinese. Unfortunately the two bronze sculpture looted from the *Old Summer Palace* during the *Second Opium War* in 1860 cannot be returned China for free. Many Chinese cultural relics that were rooted by Western imperial powers cannot be returned because there was no protection of intellectual property rights in the special historical time. But now when we live in a capitalist and consumer-based world, the western imperial powers impose certain rules to protect IPR mainly for their own sake (Wang, 2010).

6.4 China: In the Transitional Stage

The Chinese shanzhai phenomenon became considerable at the beginning of the new millennium. The counterfeit products exist in China since China's Opening-up Policy in 1980s. Suffering a hundred year of wars, and political and social upheavals, China finally is determined to develop economy at the most rapid space. As a beginner, China has to learn advanced technology and management system from developed countries during the process of urbanization and modernization. Thus, the term of imitation becomes complex when it is regarded as the inevitable activity involved in the process of learning, and at the same time it is related to copyright infringement referring to shanzhai phenomenon. China is in the transitional stage when market rules and law systems are developing and improving and are not mature as yet. It is the incomplete law system, undeveloped rules and weak law enforcement that provide space for the survival and blooming of shanzhai products.

The necessity of imitation and unregulated markets are briefly two situational antecedents for shanzhai phenomenon. When the particular context in which shanzhai phenomenon comes to be in is considered, shanzhai products are understood as the cultural production that is locally produced through the activities of local people. The Chinese users, as insiders, view shanzhai phenomenon in terms of situational influences and hold their own perceptions.

As I argued in the last paragraph about two faces of imitation, imitation as the main aspect of shanzhai phenomenon can be also regarded as normal means for companies in their early development. During my interview, I showed my respondents the picture a car of BYD, a national automobile brand in its infancy, has a similar appearance with Mercedes-Benz Smart. WangJ, Pan, Hu, and Jiang, the four male respondents all expressed the same voice. WangJ's account is as follows:

Any company will start with imitation which is the inevitable stage. It is called learning. After this stage, the company will innovate with its own R&D. Many auto companies in western countries have been through this stage: Americans copied German; Japanese copied American. American and Japanese

had their own brands and designs later.

BYD has produced many brands-alike cars. But, such a shanzhai company attracts Buffett Venture Capital and VW, the best technical supporter. And it is the listed company in Hong Kong stock market. Now they design their own electronic-auto. This is how a national brand develops. They need time.

WangJ is an auto fan who has rich knowledge about auto industry. As he described, transforming from the shanzhai company, BYD now becomes a brand company with abundant funds due to the huge sale of cheap brand-alike autos in large low-end markets. Here is another similar example of the K-touch, an aggressive national mobile phone company. As the earliest company who produced shanzhai mobile phones, "K-touch" is another name of shanzhai mobile phones. However now, K-touch, one of advertising sponsors of CCTV¹⁾, and the top selling one among the national brands in 2009, only next to *Nokia* and *Samsung*, works very hard to build brand image.

1), China
Central
Television

Some Chinese users appear to be very tolerant of the shanzhai activities that Chinese companies practice. A sense of patriotism can be found in their accounts. During the early development stage of Chinese companies, the activities of imitation of others are highly tolerable and are not unsupported. They embrace such an ideal model that Chinese companies first sell shanzhai products to accumulate capital, to learn, to develop, and then one day they will become respectable brand companies that exercise their own innovation and possess own intellectual property rights.

Concerning another situational factor, the incomplete market system gives the space to the popularity of shanzhai products while needs of consumers are instrumental. As an insider, Hu, one of my respondents, seemed rather optimistic about the future of "messy market" and he also predicted the future of "unregulated" shanzhai products:

Chinese market is messy now because we are in the transitional stage. It is impossible that all the things develop orderly at this moment. So that is why so

many shanzhai products exist. In China, the imperfect system gives the chance to shanzhai products which are unregulated, non-systematic and informal. In a normal market, a *Nokia*-alike handset cannot exist. But shanzhai products don't care.

But I believe one day, the Chinese market will be regulated and shanzhai products will disappear. The small and non-authentic companies will either die or develop to brand companies. However some guides from government are needed.

Combining his supportive attitudes and purchases of shanzhai, we learn that he has no tendency to call for diminishment of such "unregulated" products with more elaborated systems and enforcement.

Shanzhai products are regarded as temporary production shaped by the particular social context and the particular time. And users do not at all express the necessity of currently cleaning up the industry and market. Instead, they think in the future government will deal with it. At this moment, they would better enjoy the advantages of shanzhai products.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

This is how shanzhai users rationalize their concerned behaviors, by placing their own needs and interests as the priority, by blaming the unsatisfactory aspects of brands and IP laws, and by shifting the responsibility to other people and the environment.

It would be however an over-simplification if we attribute their choice to selfishness so that they care for nothing but their own interests. The role and practices of consumers in the commercial society are their power relations with other agents should be taken into account in order to capture a comprehensive view of the overall situation.

Thus, I intend to employ the theory developed by De Certeau in his book (1984) "Practices of Everyday Life" which is one of the main texts about studying culture in everyday life.

7.1 Theory

De Certeau (1984) stated his cultural study perspective addressed the subtle ways in which ordinary people resist systems from within. De Certeau searches for the imposed system, how an ordinary man invents his "own routines" to raise the quality of his life.

7.1.1 The strong- the powerful- produce rules- strategy

There are two contrary roles named as "the strong" and "the weak". The dominant role has the power to make rules, laws and formality, as well as to produce cultural production. In addition, they provide the "instructions to use". In the commercial world, "their products are scattered in the graphs of televised, urbanistic,

and commercial production" (De Certeau, 1984, p31). By making use of all the available resources, they exercise "technocratic" strategies to establish the action models referring to economic, political and scientific rationality. As my understanding, the "strategy" is equivalent to the ways in which the elite create the languages of power structure. For instance, governments, schools and brand companies belong to "the strong".

7.1.2 The weak-passively imposed on- own ways of manipulations- tactics
Compared with "the strong", "the weak" are the users who consume the products and rules that are imposed on them. The imposed knowledge and action models are manipulated by users who are not the producers. They are no different from television reviewers, sitting in front of the screen. They cannot write anything on the screen; they play no role in the process of production; they have no right to modify the programs. They are pure receivers, the weak role.

But at the same time, faced with the laws and instructions that are imposed on them by the dominant roles, they carry out operations of their own. Certeau defined such operations as "tactics" (De Certeau, 1984). Here are the details that he described (p32):

They made something else out of them; they subverted them from within - not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs which they could not escape...

De Certeau's passage above tells that according to consumers' own criteria, they select pieces taken from these instructions in order to compose new stories.

The majority of the population is "the weak" when they have no power in certain fields. The commercial consumer is one example.

7.2 Tactics That Shanzhai Users Use

Now we live in a commercial society. Many people living in cities

are freely spending money on a wide range of commodities everywhere from department stores to 24-hour kiosk. We are reading magazines and newspapers jammed with advertisement and watching commercials on televisions.

As a consumer, one is receiving not only advertisement about products and brands, but also action and moral models of how to behave as a *proper* consumer. For instance, as a consumer, one is suggested to purchase in the specific *proper* places, to purchase the *proper* merchandises with *proper* currencies. *Proper*, a complex concept, however, is simplified here as legal and ethical. Taken together, an ideal consumer is the one who should care about, though not take responsibility of, the whole industries, markets and society together along with one's own interests.

From the shanzhai phenomenon, we know that shanzhai users use "tactics" with their own "ways of manipulation" of the rules imposed on them. Shanzhai consumers are taught by the brand advertisement that is to promote the symbolic value of products; at the same time they turn to purchase counterfeit ones with lower price. They are taught to respect the law and moral formality; at the same time they pretend to ignore the loss of others like society, industry and brand companies.

7.3 Power Relation Between the "Weak" and "Strong"

We must, however, clarify these "tactics", not simply as the practices that consumers do to gain more profits, but as "power relations" between the strong and the weak. It is better for us to be concerned with "battles or games between the strong and the weak" (De Certeau, 1984, P34).

By contrast to the strategies that "the strong" practice, tactics is "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus". Producers are doing "technocratic strategies" that is able to produce formality through all the available media resources, like television images, newspaper texts, commercial products and social events. Thus, for users, the space of "technocratic strategies" is the space of others. They are "within the enemy's field of vision" as Von Bulow (n.d.) put it. De Certeau made it clear what the position of consumers is in the commercial society (De Certeau, 1984, P37).

It (user) does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. ... , build up its own position, and plan raids.

Moreover, De Certeau continued to indicate the power position of the weak, within the field of the strong whose power is related to its visibility (1984, p38):

Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power.

Now it becomes understandable that why my respondents desperately claimed that "as long as consumers are not cheated". Within enemy territory, "lacking of own place, lacking of a view of the whole... the absence of power", they are self-protecting "at close quarters". As individual consumers, scattered over the terrain of the dominant instructions, they gradually develop a sense of crisis that it is important to protect one's own interests. When their interests conflict with the ones of these producers, despite of the formality imposed on the consumers, they learn to use tactics- "an art of the weak" (1984, p37) - to make their situations more favourable, to protect their "last resort", to long for "cheaper and better" products within the order established by the companies, sales agents, and, at the larger extent, by the markets. They have neither insights nor power to hold a view of the whole to care for others. In consequence, consumers accept shanzhai products, though they are instructed not so; and consumers limit their eyes mainly focusing on their own profits.

Shanzhai purchases, however, are not the only trick that consumers play. Purchases of the smuggled and stolen products have longer history. Many people have been working on it in order to eliminate such behaviors that they perceive as unethical and harmful to society. Nevertheless, the understanding of the power position of consumers, the power relations with others,

and consumers' own interests and needs, helps us to reveal the motivations underlying such behaviors, and to realize that such behavior is more than just an unethical behavior.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

8.1 Both Shanzhai and Authentic Find Their Places

Compared with its authentic counterpart, the shanzhai one usually has similar visual attribute albeit with lower price and inferior quality. In the environment, like China, where shanzhai products have been ubiquitous for a long period of time, users have gradually developed sophisticated skills to choose which to buy due to the different use scenarios.

Hu bought the shanzhai *Packfree* watch and played it for several days at home; while he wears the *Armani* watch to enact his social identity whenever he goes to work or to socialize.

Jiang bought a bunch of shanzhai *Nike* sneakers for the visual value to catch the trend and to show his good taste, and wear them in everyday life; when he goes to gym, he wears the authentic *Nike* sports shoes and throws it away only when it is worn out.

WangYY spent ¥900 on a shanzhai *Nokia* N97 with exactly the same appearance when she was obsessed with the one in titillating advertisement. She was holding the tangible one in hands, played it for two evenings and then sold it. At the same time, she still uses her *Sharp* mobile phone to call friends and to send messages as usual.

Zhang bought pirated learning materials to cram for the examination while she would like to spend much more money on the hardcover of her favored novel.

When a particular product category is available in the market, clever users know whether and when they need it. Hu bought and used the shanzhai watch as a toy for the novelty purpose; Jiang knows good quality is not required for his behavior pattern of fast consumption; although emotionally enchanted by the advertisement of N97, she still kept the rationality that she decided to compromise by buying a shanzhai one instead of investing ¥4500 to meet such a desire; Zhang has her own criteria that the learning materials ask for too high price while her favored one not.

Due to the various ways of use in the complex everyday life, a variety of products with different attributes are provided to meet various needs of users in its own way in which users focus on the use value, visual value or symbolic value with the economic consideration.

In the world, when brand corporations strategically offer a

certain range of products to their targeted customers in a way in which they impose unbalanced control over the money, beliefs, emotion and behaviors of consumers (Blumenthal, 1995, p223), shanzhai products appearing in the marginal place offer alternatives for users to practice other behaviors. Moreover, within the conventions and formality imposed on, users are still capable of generating pride and comfort from their shanzhai behaviors that are otherwise regarded as deviant, unethical or even illegal. Examples of my respondents, like Jiang, Jin and Hu, have been described through my work.

Here, instead of simply defining shanzhai products as the copy counterpart of brand products, it would be more appropriate to regard shanzhai products as the equally independent entity that possess its own field where shanzhai users have corresponding behaviors according to the particular shanzhai product category.

8.2 When Does Post-Brand Time Come?

We live in a world where brand corporations dominate. They attempt to embed the stories and ideas about their brands in the mind of consumers by injecting sells advertisements everywhere: television networks, paper media and outdoor media. They provide story model and cultural cues that guide us how live our lives properly and happily; they reduce the complex real life into a short magazine-style entertaining story in which their products bring us well-being and gratification.

This is the sense of belief we face today.

However, do we believe the stories about life they tell? Do we believe the odd sense they filter into the reality?

Some do, like Jiang, Jin and Hu. They believe commercial products can bring them respect and make who they are.

Some do not, like WangJ. He believes all the stories are performances in the pursuit of fortune.

Not only WangJ, from the accounts of other shanzhai users that I have interviewed, an element of discontentment of the commercial world dominated by brands can be explicitly found. Such emotion resonates with the argument about the cultural meaning of “resistance from the grassroots against the authority” and the traditional meaning of the word “shanzhai山寨”.

Then, in the commercial term, would it be possible that shanzhai products as non-brand ones are used by users to express their attitude against brand-dominant commercial culture? Would it be possible that shanzhai products develop a youth subculture with the ideologies that are concerned with anti-establishment, non-conformity and anti-authoritarianism in the fashion of consumption, just like punk and rap do?

There is one shanzhai user that I have interviewed used his shanzhai mobile phone to voice his rebellion against the brand-dominant commercial society:

I think my shanzhai mobile phone is cool. It is different from any other so called “high-class” expensive brand ones. When people use *Nokia* business smartphones, they do think they are classy people. They don't know they are manipulated by the brand. They behave as the brands tell them. I don't want to be controlled. I need freedom.

This user is an urban young man working in the media. He explicitly relates his non-brand handset to the freedom out of control by brand.

Shanzhai products appearing as “aliens” in the society dominated by brand corporations have the potential to become a type of sub-culture that indicates the coming of post-brand ideology.

8.3 Brand: An Embarrassing Word

From shanzhai users, a sense of brand in the Chinese context is revealed. They purchase brand products for the brand name and the social status associated with; but at the same time they desperately deny the influence of the symbolic value of the logos. Instead, they claim they purchase the brand product either because they have the capability of appreciating the aesthetic quality or because they value the practical attributes like quality and functions. Therefore, purchasing products for the brand name brings them shame and discomfort even though they are actually doing so.

Such sense of brand is related to the “parvenus” who have had bad reputation among Chinese people due to their blindly purchase of luxury brands. The abstract image of this type of consumption pattern is shared by many Chinese people. Thus, people have gradually shaped the idea that purchasing a product mainly for the logos is equivalent to having no taste and vanity. This idea is explicitly expressed in my interviews with all the users, both of shanzhai and non-shanzhai.

Except people who has no sense of brands, all desperately denied that they were influenced by the symbolic value of the logos as if they are humiliated by these logos. Look at what they say:

- I bought it because it is good-looking, not for the brand.
- The logo happens to be there. First I think it is beautiful.
- Because I appreciate the design, instead of the name of brand.

There are more examples. I only cite a few here. And none of them admitted straightforwardly that “Yes, I bought it because the brand is big”. Or they did not dare to. If someone implicitly did so, the explanation would be followed immediately: “mainly because I love the design”, “I think it is beautiful” or “I love the material”.

The accounts of my respondents in the interviews appear to be in some extent contradictory to the phenomenon of “sweeping cult of luxury brands in Asia” by Chadha and Husband (2006), to

the hypothesis of “significant brand influence in shanzhai purchases” (Gentry et al, 2001; Phau & Thau, 2009; Phau, Sequeira & Dix, 2009), and even to the public views. It is because the *idea* that is shaped by the prior cultural understandings of the unacceptable consumption pattern of “parvenus”.

During the thirty years of economic development, now Chinese people have developed a bizarre sense of brand leading to their careful claim on the relationship between the brand name and their purchases. Even in the shanzhai phenomenon in which the influence of brand is not avoidable, users still attempt to add some flavors of personal aesthetic preferences and rationality. Just like WangYY claimed:

When I was a kid, I bought *Nike* shoes because I thought the brand was big. But now I grow up. I still buy them only when I think they are good-looking.

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